

Gnostic Thought in Milton's *Paradise Lost*

Descent, Creation, Materialism, and the Eve-Sophia Parallel

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Abstract

This paper presents the novel argument that John Milton's *Paradise Lost* shows clear evidence of Gnostic influence. While the potential influence of gnostic concepts on Milton has been noted before, previous work has been partial, suggestive, and/or limited to other of Milton's works. Here, we build on the case made by Michael Bryson regarding Milton's *Paradise Regained* by providing our own reading of four core themes in the prior *Paradise Lost* through a gnostic lens: (1) the manner of creation through the Son, (2) Milton's understanding of materialism, (3) the Son's attitude orientation toward outward displays of power, and (4) the parallels between Milton's Eve and the gnostic Sophia. We ground this argument around Milton's Gnosticism by presenting the historical case that Milton had access to, and was likely persuaded by, key aspects of ancient Gnosticism found within both Christian heresiologists (e.g., Irenaeus, Tertullian) and Neoplatonism (Plotinus). We then survey our core themes of *Paradise Lost*, presenting evidence around where ancient Gnosticism – in concert with other, often overlapping influences such as Neoplatonism and parabiblical literature – seems to provide the best framework for understanding certain, distinct elements of Milton's conceptual and poetic frameworks.

Keywords

Milton – Gnosticism – *pistis* – *gnosis* – *Paradise Lost*

1 Methodological and Terminological Preliminaries on Milton and Gnosticism

It is useful to begin with an important note on Milton's terminology to familiarize scholars of Gnosticism with an important dimension of John Milton's thought. Milton (1608–1674) is an Arian anti-trinitarian. He believes that the Son who is God's first creation and Jesus (the man from Bethlehem) are one and the same, but neither are co-substantial with the Father. Milton makes a point of referring to "Jesus" in *Paradise Regained*, and for many Milton scholars a turning point in *Paradise Regained* is that Jesus recognizes that he is the Son. In *Paradise Lost*, the prior and much more substantive and conceptually complex of the two works, Milton always refers to the Son, and not to Jesus. We therefore attempt to refer to "Jesus" in reference to *Paradise Regained* and "the Son" in *Paradise Lost*.

It is also worth mentioning that Milton makes a point of never referring to either the Son or Jesus as "Christ." As an anti-monarchist, Milton refuses to identify Jesus as the "king of kings" or in similarly monarchical language found in "orthodox" Christian traditions. This further marks his distance from these traditions and adds to the likelihood that he was attracted to the "heretical" traditions of Gnosticism discussed in this article that typically reject such language.¹

Meanwhile, it is similarly helpful at the outset to make some clarifying remarks around Gnosticism as a term and category, particularly directed toward Milton scholars. Any work on Gnosticism these days comes with the requisite caveats and disclaimers: that Gnosticism is a disputed category; that the optimism around its totality as a defined, ancient religious system in 1970s scholarship has since undergone substantial critique and unwinding (hence "Gnosticism" has become merely "Gnostic thought" or "Gnostic texts"); that some scholars question whether it is useful as a category at all to the point that even "Gnosticism" itself is to be discarded; and that now the pendulum swings back the other way again with some reclaiming the category either as transhistorical phenomenon or defining the category as a narrow but very real historical movement.²

1 For Gnosticism on this point, see Fallon (1979); cf. Apoc. Adam NHC V,5 and Melch NHC IX,1; Bryson 2012 109–133.

2 Instead of providing a full bibliography and literature review, I direct readers to a few recent representatives of these schools of thought, with extensive bibliography and discussion therein. The skeptical view of Gnosticism is articulated by King (2005) and Williams (1999); the transhistorical view by DeConick (2016); the historical view by Burns (2014).

We accept some critiques of the skeptics – namely that there was no totalizing historical movement rightly called Gnosticism – while still seeing defensible value in using the term to describe certain texts, modes of thought, and groups of people with clusters of overlapping concepts, beliefs, and practices.

Such a view is more akin to a polythetic taxonomy than the older, essentialized view of Gnosticism from the 1970s. A polythetic taxonomy, which accepts certain arguments of scholars like DeConick and Burns, is better able to capture general constellations of modes of thinking and types of ideas, which in turn results in a more effective description and analytical position when engaging complicated, contested, evolving, and often poorly preserved phenomena.³ We thus proceed, using terms like Gnosticism, Gnostic thought, and *gnosis* as reflecting historically and conceptually linked modes of thought, belief, and practice found in texts, conceptual systems, and even historical groups, from the ancient world forward.

2 Milton and Gnosticism

One of the very few scholars to explore the potential intersection of Milton and Gnosticism is the comparative literature scholar Michael Bryson. In his book chapter, “The Gnostic Milton,” Bryson argues that Milton’s portrayal of Jesus in *Paradise Regained* is “an embodiment of a Miltonic Gnosticism,” arguing that Milton’s portrayal reflects fundamentally Gnostic views. Bryson bases his argument specifically on *Paradise Regained* and Jesus’s emphasis there on internal knowledge (*gnosis*), which is in sharp contrast, he argues, with the Son depicted in *Paradise Lost* whose orientation is turned outward and earthly through the external valuation of faith (*pistis*).

In Bryson’s account, Satan’s temptations are indicative of *pistis*, namely as reflecting earthly temptation.⁴ Bryson argues that Jesus’s rejections of these earthly temptations indicate his ascent to *gnosis*, which occurs throughout the course of the poem. Milton’s Jesus, in this argument, stands in distinct parallel to the essential role of knowledge and ascent in Gnostic thought, as we see for example in the Gospel of Philip (NHC II, 3), where *pistis* is valuable, but only as a preliminary to true *gnosis* which is not a reliance on externals but rather an internal, true understanding. Bryson exclusively offers his analysis

3 Polythetic classification in application to religion was famously introduced by Smith 1980. For a specific application of polytheism to the similarly slippery trans-historical phenomenon of Hermeticism, see Robertson 2019.

4 Bryson, 114.

on Jesus's upward trajectory towards *gnosis* depicted in *Paradise Regained* as indicating Milton's alignment with "an old 'heretical' tradition," namely Gnosticism, arguing that the move from *pistis* (external knowledge and valuation) to *gnosis* (internal knowledge and valuation) is found both in Milton's Son of *Paradise Lost* and in the conceptual framework of Gnosticism.⁵

Bryson, furthermore, deals only with the Gnostic ascent of the Jesus of *Paradise Regained* via his turn from the external (*pistis*) to the internal (*gnosis*). In this paper, we offer the implied other half of Bryson's argument, namely the role of Gnostic descent and the emanation of the Godhead to the material world of the created order. Our argument will revolve primarily around the outwardness of the Son in *Paradise Lost*, indicated primarily through the Son's creation of Earth in Book 7 – a Miltonic departure from the traditional book of Genesis – and through the depiction of the Son's concentration of "raw power."⁶

Additionally and importantly, Bryson argues that such elements of Gnostic influence are of "parallel development, not historical influence."⁷ Though Milton obtained an extensive education and likely had access to an abundance of materials from antiquity, direct evidence for his exact learning and literary sources is scarce. Campbell and Corns point out that this problem is a direct result of "the syllabus at Cambridge ... be[ing] the Cinderella topic in studies of the university in the seventeenth century, partly because evidence is in short supply, but also because historians have been more concerned with the university as a national institution than with the student experience."⁸ Milton's likely access to specific sources, in other words, is not only difficult to research due to a scarcity of evidence but also has been given relatively little attention due to scholars' preferences for other areas of study.

Despite the fact that Gnosticism was a conceptual phenomenon known for centuries, the scarcity of evidence around Milton's educational source material is further complicated by the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library in Egypt in 1945, long after Milton's death (1674). The Nag Hammadi corpus is today is our clearest conceptual comparanda when analyzing Gnosticism, resulting in the highly speculative challenge of trying to infer where the ancient Nag Hammadi material might have influenced other ancient material that then became available to Milton. With no access to the Nag Hammadi texts, in other words, Milton's direct access to Gnostic thought is uncertain and most likely would have been indirect, leading Bryson to conduct his analysis at the level of con-

5 Bryson, 115.

6 Bryson 2016, 125.

7 Bryson 1971, 115.

8 Campbell and Corns 2008, 30.

ceptual parallel as opposed to direct historical influence. In this approach, Bryson's conclusions (and others such as Nuttall and Bloom, discussed briefly below) are limited to the view that generally if intriguingly similar ideas appear in both the Nag Hammadi material and in Milton, and the consequent speculation that perhaps the former influenced the latter in some highly indirect sort of way through textual intermediaries in the centuries between Nag Hammadi's authorship and Milton's life.

We can put the matter more bluntly: Milton did not directly use or explicitly reference the Nag Hammadi corpus, such as specific primary sources from Gnosticism such as the Gospel of Thomas (NHC II, 2). However, we argue (with Bryson) that Gnostic ideas nonetheless made their way into his thought, specifically in his depiction of the Son's descent in *Paradise Lost*. Indeed, in a departure from Bryson, we argue that we do in fact have evidence for Milton's use of ancient sources – especially the Neoplatonist Plotinus and the Christian “fathers” Irenaeus and Tertullian – where Gnostic ideas were extensively and explicitly discussed, albeit in a strongly polemic context.⁹ Such source material provides a suggestive vector for historical influence and lends plausibility to our own conceptual argument here, which we undergird with a specific and extensive discussion of Milton's likely Gnosticism sources alongside his own distinctive elements of thought.

The four categories we propose as our orienting framework of comparison (Creation; Externals; Outwardness and Power; Eve/Sophia) find extensive discussion in the ancient sources on Gnosticism available to Milton, both Christian and Greco-Roman. Such sources discuss the Gnostic views of creation and descent, materialism and outwardness, and the distinctive role of Sophia. Christian polemicists such as Irenaeus and Tertullian, for example, provide extensive detail around Gnostic cosmologies as well as specifically polemicize against their purported ethical systems, which finds further support in the works of Plotinus.

Before we proceed into the comparative analysis of *Paradise Lost* and these ancient sources, however, we must first establish potential linkages between Milton and these other authors. To put the matter as a question: did Milton read, or could he have read, Gnostic sources at some point during his education and/or later life? In other words, can we put our conceptual overlap on a firmer historical basis in terms of more positivist conclusions around Milton's influences? In this article's subsequent sections we will make extensive reference to a host of potential influences on Milton: on Gnosticism, particularly

9 Iren., *Haer.* 1.2; Tert., *Val.*; Plot., *Enn.* 2.9, often titled “Against the Gnostics.”

Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Plotinus; from Christianity, the Gospel of John, Life of Adam and Eve, and others too. So it is proper to start by turning our attention to these authors and their texts to explore whether they were available to and used by Milton himself.

Our clearest evidence comes from Milton himself. In his *Areopagitica* speech, Milton explicitly names several of the Gnostic heresiologists, notably excepting Tertullian: “Who finds not that Irenaeus, Epiphanius, Jerom, and others discover more heresies then they well confute, and that oft for heresie which is the truer opinion.”¹⁰ Milton here not only makes it clear that he has extensively read and studied the heresiologists who treated Gnostic thought, but he even claims to have agreed with the so-called heresies more than the heresiologists! Such a statement might be unsurprising coming from Milton, an extremely wide-ranging thinker who was quite idiosyncratic relative to the mainstream thought of his time.

Meanwhile, the other lines of likely, non-Gnostic influence are just as well attested, if not more so. The Gospel of John, as a foundational book in the Christian Bible, was obviously widely and carefully read and would have undoubtedly been a touchstone for Milton in any of his studies. It bears mentioning, though, the markedly Gnostic undertones of the Gospel of John that made it such a widely read and engaged book among historical Gnostics of the first several centuries, to the point that some have concluded that John itself is a fundamentally Gnostic text.¹¹ Works such as *Pistis Sophia* (ca. third century CE) and the *Apocryphon of John* (second century CE), for example, both seem to have been written in clear dialogue with the later canonized Gospel of John, and significantly develop its themes.

Milton’s use of Clement of Alexandria and Plutarch is also strongly attested. Clement, a Christian influenced strongly by Greco-Roman philosophy and in clear dialogue with Gnosticism himself, was widely read during Milton’s time.¹² Furthermore, like the other church fathers mentioned above whom Milton explicitly names, Clement also receives specific mention in Milton’s own writings that note Clement’s transmission of non-orthodox views: “The ancientest fathers must be next removed, as Clement of Alexandria, and that Eusebian book of evangelic preparation, transmitting our ears through a hoard of heathenish obscenities to receive the gospel.”¹³

10 Milton 1644.

11 DeConick 2013.

12 Clement’s *Paed.*, *Strom.*, and *Hypo.* all contain apparently Gnostic views ranging from cosmology to ethics; the *Strom.* also contains explicit engagement with Gnostics; Wagner 1971.

13 Kerrigan, Rumrich, and Fallon 2007, 940.

Plutarch, himself a (Middle) Platonist philosopher, was even more widely read, as his *Parallel Lives* and *Moralia* were extensively copied, read, and studied throughout Europe before and after Milton's time. Scholars have found a host of specific allusions to Plutarch's works in Milton as well as more conceptual influences.¹⁴ Much the same can be said for the apocryphal Life of Adam and Eve which, though much less studied around Milton as compared to Plutarch, has received some important and accurate attention.¹⁵ *The Life of Adam and Eve*, written perhaps in the first few centuries of the common era, survives in a variety of languages and manuscript traditions. Most notably for our purposes, the Latin version (*Vitae Adae et Evae*) was widely copied and available in the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, with Milton's access to it in some form highly likely.¹⁶

At the same time, the broader influences of Neo-Platonism and Protestantism are obvious and substantial. As discussed briefly above in the context of the Cambridge Platonists, of all the Greco-Roman philosophies the one that had the greatest influence on the philosophical and religious thinking of the Reformation and Renaissance was Platonism as mediated by later Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic thinkers, who were widely influential on the church fathers of late antiquity and the medieval periods too. Neo-Platonism and its focus on inward rationality later made for a natural pairing with Protestantism, whose focus on the individual's ability to reason, engage with God, and achieve knowledge was already over century old by the time that Milton began his Paradise cycle.

Milton's historical context provides further evidence for his likely access to and use of these ancient, non-orthodox sources. Milton studied in Cambridge at the same time as the Cambridge Platonists, well known for their unconventional – and some say Gnostic – use of Platonic and Neo-Platonic material. The founder of the Cambridge Platonists, Benjamin Whichcote, began school at Emmanuel College, Cambridge in 1628. Milton began school at Christ's College around 1625 and studied through 1632 to obtain his M.A., making them contemporaries. While we do not know the extent of the connection between Milton and Whichcote, or between Milton and the other Cambridge Platonists, certainly their shared erudition alongside their contemporaneous time at Cambridge at least opens the possibility of some influence between Milton and the group.

14 Leonard 1998; Leonard 2000; Boehrer 2000.

15 Revard 2005.

16 Revard 2005, 80–81.

Other central figures of the Cambridge Platonists such as Ralph Cudworth (1617–1688, enrolled in Cambridge in 1630 thus overlapping with Milton) and John Smith (1618–1652, enrolled at Cambridge in 1636) drew heavily from Plotinus and specifically drew from Plotinus's *Against the Gnostics*.¹⁷ The study of Gnostic thought as mediated by at least Plotinus was certainly present in Cambridge at the time, and it seems at minimum plausible that Milton – with his level of erudition and knowledge – had access to the same source material as the Cambridge Platonists, and even that Milton knew some of them. Some scholars have already made this case at the level of conceptual overlap and/or direct historical connection.¹⁸

More broadly, the use of Gnostic material, directly or indirectly, would be an unsurprising overlap between these ambitious writers. The Cambridge Platonists, for instance, drew from a strong theological background – Whichcote was a deacon and a priest, for example – to combine with wide-ranging philosophical learning as a means of conceptualizing the supremely perfect God. This is little different than Milton's own approach, synthesizing a wide variety of theological and philosophical texts, concepts, and traditions in a highly unconventional way to explore ideas at the intersection between philosophy and religion.¹⁹ It is here, at this intersection, that Gnosticism (either as a broad category or in the form of some early Gnostic/Christian texts) would have found a ready home in both Milton and the Cambridge Platonists.

Further, although the late discovery of the Nag Hammadi material makes any stronger conclusion about their influence more speculative and indirect, the historical possibilities run beyond Plotinus and Gnostic influences via Neoplatonism. Although Milton and the Cambridge Platonists had no access to now-foundational Coptic texts such as the Nag Hammadi library, the ancient Christian heresiologists who engaged with Gnosticism and Gnostic thought were both widely available and widely read in the seventeenth century. More specifically, Irenaeus and Tertullian were both available in Milton's time in Latin. Conceptually, Irenaeus's corpus replicates much of what we see in later-

17 Jones 2005, 23. Jones notes a variety of such texts by Smith and Cudworth that used Plotinus's "Against the Gnostics" (Jones 2005, 23n81). Smith 1660, "The True Way or Method," see also in Patrides 1980, 9, 134; Cudworth 1647, see also Patrides 1980, 17, 90–127, esp. 98. Cf. Plot., *Enns* 2.9.15.

18 The argument is an old one. On this, see Nicholson 1925; more recently, Givens 2010, 147–188.

19 See Jones regarding the Cambridge Platonists perceived intersection between Gnosticism and Calvinism (2005, 23). Compare especially Milton's own complex engagement with Calvinism and its thought around pre-destination, which may well reflect Milton's views around the Son and Satan in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*.

discovered Gnostic material, such as the ideas in the Apocryphon of John which he quoted and used in some form, and in the contrast between *gnosis* and *pistis*.²⁰ The same can be said for Tertullian, who was widely available in Latin to the Cambridge Platonists (and thus Milton too).²¹

In sum, while scholars have therefore been able to conclude with some certitude that Milton carefully read and studied these early Christian writers who discussed Gnosticism in detail, this remains an understudied area.²² Certainly, though, what limited evidence we do have demonstrates the strong likelihood of Milton's exposure to a host of Gnostic ideas discussed in this paper such as creation through a lower and flawed intermediary, hierarchies of ontology and creation that reflect emanation from the divine realm to the material one that enmesh, distract, and capture even divine beings such as the Son, the role of *gnosis* and *pistis* in both falling away from the divine realm and returning to it, and the presence and characteristics of the Gnostic Sophia whose flaws and retribution play crucial elements in Gnostic ascent – albeit mediated by heresiologists like Irenaeus, Epiphanius, and Jerome.

Such lines of Gnostic influence help explain Milton's thought beyond what we can find in other, non-Gnostic sources that are both clearly present and can also partially explain Milton's departures from orthodoxy. We are thus able to conclude, with some provisional confidence, that Milton's Gnosticism was quite real, both in the transhistorical sense of conceptual overlap and in the more concretely historical sense of drawing direct influence from ancient Gnosticism via heresiologists which well suited his idiosyncratic and ambitious projects.

3 The Gnostic Cycle of Descent and Ascent in *Paradise Lost* & *Paradise Regained*

To now move onto our own analysis of Milton, we can return to the case originally made by Bryson. Bryson begins his investigation into the Gnostic ascent of Jesus in *Paradise Regained* by arguing that the “knowledge” on which Jesus

20 Iren., *Haer.* books 1 and 2, esp. *Haer.* 1.29–30, and *Haer.* 1.6.1 for his polemic against the Valentinians.

21 Tert., *Val.* 9–10, 17, 19, 20, 24–28, 39.

22 A few of the rare but notable contributions: Pritchard 1937; Mueller 1998; Gregory 2013; and Forsyth 2003. Forsyth can assert confidently about “the descriptions of Gnostic cosmogonies Milton read in Irenaeus or Epiphanius,” including the role of “[t]he Gnostic Sophia” (2003, 48); note the lack of Tertullian mentioned here too.

relies is indicative of *gnosis*. Specifically, Bryson points to the Gospel of Thomas (NHC II, 2) and the Gospel of Philip (NHC II, 3) – neither of which, we must add, were available to Milton – to highlight the difference between *gnosis* and *pistis*. *Gnosis* is the more favorable of the two because of its emphasis on the internal, in contrast to *pistis* which is externally directed. Bryson claims that “Milton creates a son who emphasizes *gnosis* over *pistis*, the internal over the external, seeking an inner light experienced as a sense of divine similitude, an intimate and experiential knowledge as opposed to the formal, book-learned knowledge Satan offers, and he displays a manifest lack of interest in inhabiting the traditional savior role.”²³

Bryson is mostly right, as Satan offers Jesus all of the knowledge of Greek antiquity: the books of the great philosophers, Plato, Aristotle, and so forth. Jesus rejects this dubious gift, for he has already read these books and understands the knowledge they offer. In themselves these books offer nothing; they are valuable only if you have the inner light to reveal their true, divine meaning. Yet contra Bryson, Jesus in *Paradise Regained* is a gifted reader of the Hebrew Bible, showing that he does not eschew such traditions entirely.

Nonetheless, Bryson is generally correct to assert that, because of this, Milton’s Jesus appears as a Gnostic redeemer as opposed to the savior because he “disparag[es] book knowledge in favor of inner illumination.”²⁴ Bryson goes on to argue that the temptations Satan offers – food, political power, superficial knowledge – are all externals, and in Jesus’s rejections of them, he ascends to a much more inward-facing figure. Ultimately, in these rejections, Jesus “realizes that the divine is to be found within.”²⁵

These points are especially salient as we consider the ascent toward *gnosis* that the Son/Jesus has undertaken in the plot progression from *Paradise Lost* to *Paradise Regained*. Yet Bryson only briefly considers the role of the Son in *Paradise Lost*, quickly noting that “This is no longer the Son [in *Paradise Regained*] who in *Paradise Lost* seems to be just as concerned with raw power as either Satan or the Father.”²⁶ While Milton surely saw the Son and Jesus as one and the same but in different incarnations, Bryson has identified – albeit provisionally and in passing – a key shift that helps explain the transition between the two titles (Son and Jesus) that arise from Jesus’s self-awareness. Though Bryson briefly identifies the Son of *Paradise Lost* as one who is in favor of the

23 Bryson, 119.

24 Bryson, 119.

25 Bryson, 132.

26 Bryson, 125.

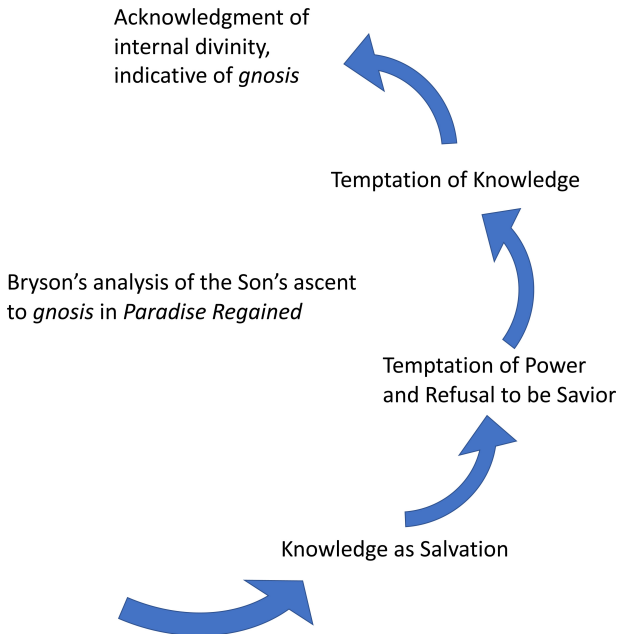


FIGURE 1 Bryson's depiction of Jesus's ascent to *gnosis*

external objects, his examination of "Miltonic Gnosticism" includes only *Paradise Regained*, which indeed arrives after *Paradise Lost* and was considered by Milton as the second half of a coherent pair.

Bryson traces Jesus's ascent to *gnosis* in four main points: internal knowledge as salvation, refusing both the temptation of power and his role as a savior, refusing the temptation of knowledge, and finally, an acknowledgement of his internal divinity – not the divinity of being God himself but rather the recognition that he is the Son from *Paradise Lost*. Jesus's view of internal knowledge as being key to salvation is especially indicative of Gnostic thought and Bryson notes that it begins Jesus's upward trajectory.

He then argues that the temptations of knowledge and power are both external, earthly things and Jesus's rejection of them show his inward-facing nature. Additionally, Bryson identifies Milton's Jesus as being a reluctant savior, who instead views himself as a Gnostic redeemer, focused more on his inner state than the states of others. In culmination, these three points lead Jesus to acknowledge his internal divinity, and this is where Bryson concludes his ascent to *gnosis*.

In *The Alternative Trinity: Gnostic Heresy in Marlowe, Milton, and Blake*, A.D. Nuttall engages with Milton's embodiment of Gnosticism, arguing that Gnosticism acted as a "liberator" for Marlowe, Milton, and Blake from oppres-

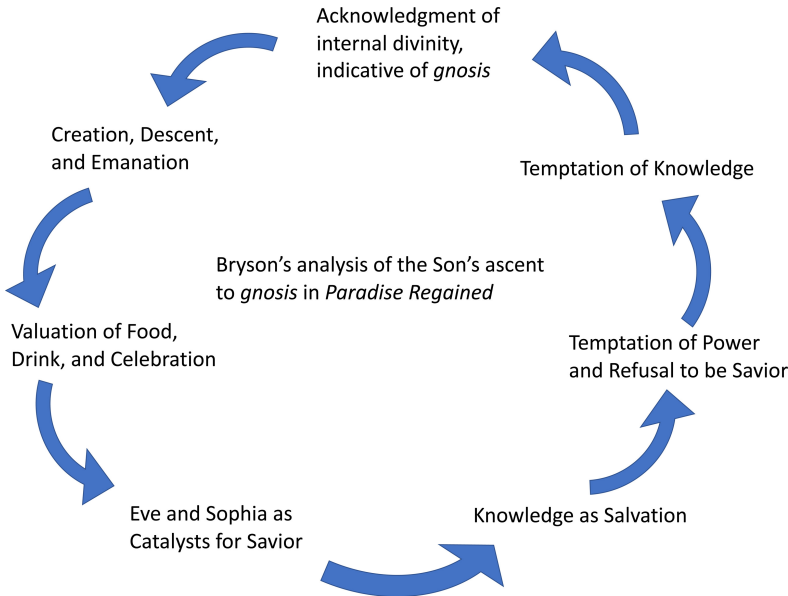


FIGURE 2 Gnostic cycle depicted by Milton in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*

sive Christian orthodoxy.²⁷ However, other scholars have questioned Nuttall's thesis due to perceived logical fallacies, and his work has largely been disregarded as unpersuasive.²⁸ Aside from Nuttall and Harold Bloom, whose work explores abstractly broad categories and not historical influence, Bryson has been the only scholar to substantially engage with the intersection of Milton and Gnosticism.²⁹

Our discussion will primarily parallel Bryson's in forwarding a conceptual argument for the parallels between Milton and Gnosticism. Specifically, we will be focusing on four particular areas to show the Son's descent to external *pistis* in *Paradise Lost*: (1) the Son's initiation of the creation of the world, which we term "Creation, Descent, and Emanation," (2) the prominent role of material food, drink, and celebration in the Son's actions, values, and self-understandings, (3) the Son's obsession with raw power and externals, which stand in sharp departure from the inward Jesus of *Paradise Regained*, which we term "Outwardness and the Son's Raw Power," and (4) the similarities between Milton's Eve and Sophia, an external-facing deity of wisdom and

27 Nuttall 2009, 3.

28 See, for example, Papazian 2000, 611–613; Rumrich 2001, 306–309.

29 Bloom 1997. Bloom's work contains a Coda subtitled "A Gnostic Sermon."

creation in Gnosticism, particularly with respect to their shared roles as catalysts for salvation.

These four areas collectively reflect the Son's descent to external *pistis* in *Paradise Lost*. Unlike the qualities of the Gnostic Jesus that Bryson identifies in *Paradise Regained*, this Son of *Paradise Lost* exhibits a multitude of outward tendencies and has not yet made the turn to an ascent towards *gnosis*. It is also important to note that this Gnostic cycle of descent through externals (*pistis*) and ascent through inward knowledge (*gnosis*) takes place within the broader cosmology of hierarchical emanation. In other words, this framework in Milton – described by both our model and Bryson's – is a description of the conceptual parallels around Gnostic descent and ascent and is not meant to be descriptive of Gnostic cosmology in its entirety, which itself contains a host of parallels with Neoplatonic views.

Much could be made of broader cosmological parallels between Milton's Christianity and Neoplatonic cosmology, which was widely influential in Europe both before and during Milton's day (1608–1674), but we (like Bryson) here focus instead on the narrower issue of conceptual parallels between the descent/ascent themes in both Gnostic thought and that of Milton.³⁰

We can foreground and summarize key points that Milton makes for each of our four categories to make our analysis clearer: (1) Creation: Milton's Son actively descends, himself creates, and enshrouds himself in lower order materiality, (2) Externals: Milton foregrounds the role of external things like food and drink as reflective of the materialism that precipitates the fall from God, (3) Outwardness and Power: Milton critiques the Son and his fall through the ways that he acts outwardly and ignorantly embraces the exterior trappings of power, instead of the true internal power of knowledge (*gnosis*), and (4) Eve/Sophia: Milton affords huge importance to Eve as a de facto Gnostic Sophia, who plays a crucial role in materialist descent and the redemption of the Creator – in Milton, understood as the Son.

While we indicate more precisely in our following sections where Milton's Gnostic sources likely played a role around specific concepts, it is useful to briefly summarize several of the most prominent of Milton's likely sources on Gnosticism, namely Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Plotinus. For each of the authors below, their views can be compared through our four categories summarized above for Milton.

30 Interestingly, however, Platonism and Neoplatonism are given scant treatment in Milton scholarship generally; Neoplatonism in particular seems to be a prime candidate for a productively novel lens applied to *Paradise Lost* specifically, as well as Milton more broadly.

In Irenaeus *Against Heresies*, books 1–2 provide extensive treatment of Gnostic beliefs relevant to our four categories around Milton's thought-world, in addition to core assertions about how Gnostics privilege knowledge (*gnosis*) instead of love and faith.³¹

- Creation (Iren., *Haer.* 2.2–3): creation due to the demiurge who exists outside and below the *pleroma*, which is the divine world of God and the other heavenly spirits; creation by lesser beings, in contradistinction to Irenaeus's view that creation occurred solely by the Father through the Word
- Externals (Iren., *Haer.* 1.7; 2.3): negative views of materialism tied to humanity and creation by the demiurge; the generally negative Gnostic view of the world as lacking *gnosis*
- Outwardness and Power (Iren., *Haer.* 2.6): ignorance of the Creator being, both of the nature of the creation and of the Creator God himself
- Eve/Sophia (Iren., *Haer.* 1.2; 2.12, 18): fall of Sophia due to her ambition, which results in production, her restoration, and the production of Christ

Tertullian's summaries of Gnosticism in *Against the Valentinians* similarly track the main categories used in this article in striking fashion:

- Creation (Tert., *Val.* 20, 24, 26–27, 39): creation of material bodies by the demiurge who exists outside the *pleroma* (cf. parallel points in Irenaeus); understanding Jesus as materially descending; humanity's nature understood as a combination of the material and animal natures
- Externals (Tert., *Val.* 17, 24–27): negative views of materialism, including Christ's materialism, as part of a roughly Platonic tripartite view of creation as material-animal-spiritual
- Outwardness and Power (Tert., *Val.* 19, 28): demiurge is ignorant of his nature and especially of the Father (cf. same point raised for Irenaeus)
- Eve/Sophia (Tert., *Val.* 9–10, 23): fall of Sophia due to ambition, being wrapped up with material affections, loss of her beauty, birthing a child of her own energy, being struck most of all by ignorance, and ultimate restoration (among the other points parallel to those found in Irenaeus, n.b. the focus on beauty, a particular parallel to Eve noted below in Milton); material realities as a major product of Sophia's errors, whose emotions gave rise to a spark of life

And finally, Plotinus's thought likewise contains a host of Gnostic ideas in its broader structure, and even more explicitly in *Ennead* 2.9 "Against the Gnostics".³² There, in addition to core assertions about Gnosticism's foreground-

³¹ Iren., *Haer.* 2.26, 28.

³² Mazur 2020; see also the foundational work of Mazur's doctoral advisor (Turner 1992). This

ing of the role of *gnosis*, Plotinus makes several key assertions about Gnostic thought that track with our Milton categories.³³

- Creation (Plot., *Enn.* 2.9.4–5, 8, 10–11): creation as a potentially imperfect act, occurring not due to the nature of the universe but due to an active, divine (but not necessarily good), descending presence of independent materiality separated from the world soul, in contradistinction to Plotinus's Neo/Platonic views around natural emanation.
- Externals (Plot., *Enn.* 2.9.14–16): despising of externals, in contradistinction to Plotinus's more positivist views.
- Outwardness and Power (Plot., *Enn.* 2.9.14): importance afforded to simple food and temperance.
- Eve/Sophia (Plot., *Enn.* 2.9.10): centrality in the Gnostic cosmology of the birth of Sophia as a result of descent into the material world, which not only precipitated the descent of the Creator (demiurge) to its nadir of materialism but also precipitated in turn its subsequent ascent.

In our discussion below, we integrate these sources with the core conceptual similarities initially identified by Bryson in order to provide a clearer counterpart to Bryson's account. We also provide examples from the Nag Hammadi texts to illustrate Gnostic ideas, despite their unavailability to Milton, for two reasons. First, because their core ideas around things like *pistis/gnosis* and cosmology likewise appear in the Greco-Roman and Christian material. And second, because they best and most fully articulate Gnostic ideas that otherwise only appear in polemical and therefore distorted secondary accounts of writers like Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Plotinus. We will return to these points around historical influence and specific source material in our conclusion, both in an attempt to ground our argument and to move beyond Bryson's "conceptual-only" argument.

Furthermore, as we noted above, the Gnostic influences we detect are neither systematically nor entirely Gnostic. Additionally, Gnostic influences can and often do co-occur with other religious, philosophical, and conceptual frameworks. Indeed, Milton's Gnostic thinking arises in a broader cosmological understanding with substantial debts to ancient sources both Christian and Greco-Roman, among others. In addition to other examples, several specific authors and lines of influence can particularly help explain Milton's thought: in Christianity, the Gospel of John, Clement of Alexandria, and apocryphal works

line of thought extends back to Hans Jonas. For a recent edition see Gertz 2017; important other editions are those by Alt, Dufour, Kalligas, and Spanu.

33 Plot., *Enn.* 2.9.13.

such as *The Life of Adam and Eve* from the ancient world, as well as Protestantism in Milton's time; and in Greco-Roman thought the works of Plutarch and Neo-Platonism more broadly.

Each of these lines of influence, in different ways and to different degrees, complement Gnosticism in understanding aspects of Milton's thought such as emanation (Neo-Platonism), creation via Christ (Gospel of John; Clement; Plutarch), narrative departures from Genesis (*The Life of Adam and Eve*), and the focus on internality and knowledge around salvation (Protestantism). While this article focuses primarily on the Gnostic ideas that most likely influenced Milton, we note throughout where these other, non-Gnostic influences are also plausible. We further note historical lines of transmission for these sources alongside those of Gnosticism, in order to help sketch out the historical picture of Milton's sources and likely influences.

4 Creation, Descent, and Emanation

In Gnosticism, creation occurs through emanation (with clear Neoplatonic influences), with successive lower levels of the celestial hierarchy creating the levels further beneath them. Thus, in Gnostic thought we see the emanation from the highest God to the archons and from the archons to the material world. Milton's account provides a clear parallel, with the Son fulfilling the same creative, hierarchical function as a Gnostic archon.

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton's God creates the Son, a lesser being prone to his own faults and outward materialism (see discussion in below sections), who in turn creates the material world beneath him. Milton's account of creation notably departs from the biblical account, where God creates the material world in the Hebrew Bible's Book of Genesis, and then in the New Testament where the Son appears equal to God. In both cases Milton's narrative departures are markedly Gnostic: creation occurs not simply through God but via the flawed person of the Son; and the Son is understood as a reflection of God but not identical or equal to God, what Milton calls "divine similitude."³⁴

34 "Thee next they sang of all Creation first, / Begotten Son, Divine Similitude" (Milton, *Parad. Lost* 3.383–384, Teskey 2004); "Why should not Man, / Retaining still Divine similitude / In part, from such deformities be free, And for his Makers Image sake exempt?" (Milton, *Parad. Lost* 11.511–514, Teskey 2004); "Let us make now Man in our image, Man / In our similitude" (Milton, *Parad. Lost* 7.519–520, Teskey 2004). All Milton quotes are adapted from Milton (Teskey 2004) in consultation with Milton (Digireads 2016). See also discussion in Bryson 2012, 102–119.

In this section, we argue that the Son's creation of the Earth – as opposed to the traditional Genesis narrative of the Father's creation – and the Son's physical descent from heaven to earth – unlike New Testament supercessional accounts such as the Gospel of John that foreground the Son's existence alongside God from the beginning – are key parallels between Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Gnostic thought. In Milton, the Son's creation and descent is the Son's first downward departure from heaven.

Bryson argues that in *Paradise Regained*, "As the Son 'unobserved / Home to his mother's house private' (4.638–639), he has accomplished the regaining of Paradise, making of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* a complete cycle. Where Adam and Eve move away from the divine source, the Son moves in return to it."³⁵ While Bryson has not identified where this "cycle" begins, it is at this very moment of the Son's initiating creation and descending from heaven where we see the Son actually begin Bryson's "complete cycle" that so parallels Gnostic notions of creation.

Milton's parallels to Gnostic thought are especially notable insofar as they occur in places where Milton has further modified the biblical account. Perhaps Milton's most glaring departure from the Book of Genesis occurs in Raphael's retelling of the creation of the world to Adam and Eve. In a notably significant contrast to Genesis, Milton's Father grants his Son the ability to create the world in his place, manifesting a hierarchy of creation but an act of creation that itself only takes place through the lesser Son. Here, the Father sends the Son down to initiate creation, rather than completing it himself. The Father commands:

And by my Word, begotten Son, by thee
 This I perform, speak thou, and be it don:
 My overshadowing Spirit and might with thee
 I send along, ride forth, and bid the Deep
 Within appointed bounds be Heav'n and Earth,
 Boundless the Deep, because I am who fill
 Infinitude, nor vacuous the space.
 Though I uncircumscrib'd my self retire,
 And put not forth my goodness, which is free
 To act or not, Necessitie and Chance
 Approach not mee, and what I will is Fate.³⁶

35 Bryson 2016, 132.

36 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 7.163–176 (Teskey 2004).

More generally, Milton departs from both the Hebrew Bible account and the New Testament account in his heterodox view that God creates *ex deo* and not *ex nihilo* ("I am who fill(s).")³⁷ More specifically, Milton's Father designates his begotten Son as his proxy – immediately recalling Gnostic creation by lower-order beings – and bestows the power and influence of his "Word" for the creation of the world.

This is a unique Miltonic departure from Genesis, as we see the Father moving the responsibility of creating the world down the heavenly hierarchy to his Son, as opposed to doing it himself. Creation is not, in other words, simply a direct action by God, but rather occurs in a hierarchical mode of emanation strongly reminiscent of Gnostic creation, extending from the Father to the Son and thereupon the material world. God is not fully absent from creation, as he is both the one "who fill(s) Infinitude" and he "uncircumscribed" himself, but there is a clear delegation of creative authority and creation itself to the Son.³⁸

In Gnostic thought, specifically The Apocryphon of John which, although discovered later as part of the Nag Hammadi texts and also the Berlin Codex, was known to Irenaeus and quoted by him, the creation of the material world occurs due to the error of Sophia (discussed further below).³⁹ In the Gnostic cosmology, Sophia is an archon, one of the series of heavenly, hierarchical beings. Acting without consent from the Invisible Spirit, Sophia creates a son, Ialdabaoth, who then initiates the creation of the physical world. In the making of the material world, Nicola Denzey Lewis identifies twelve archons who Ialdabaoth created to help create the material world and summarizes their cumulative actions: "At this point, the narrative of the creation of the cosmos continues, exegete, (literally 'draw out the meaning of') Genesis 1–4."⁴⁰ Like we see in Milton's depiction, creation is initiated through a series of hierarchical beings, rather than occurring in a singular act from the Father or the Invisible Spirit. Essentially, Milton's Son is fulfilling the role of a Gnostic archon, as the task has been delegated to him down through the heavenly hierarchy.⁴¹

In addition to the parallels between this top-down style of emanation and creation that we see between Milton and the Apocryphon of John's respective accounts of Genesis, we also see the Son's creation as being a physical descent

37 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 7.168 (Teskey 2004).

38 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 7.168, 170 (Teskey 2004).

39 Iren. quotes from Ap. John in *Haer*; see recent discussion in Thomassen 2021.

40 Lewis 2013, 157.

41 See Ap. John (NHC II, 1) 10.19–13.13 and 15.1–19.10 and Hyp. Arch. (NHC II, 4) 87.23–89.17 for examples of the hierarchical structure of creation via archons, which is typical of Gnostic thought. While the former source was available to Milton via Irenaeus, the latter was not and was only re-discovered as part of the Nag Hammadi corpus.

from Heaven, which thus sparks the Son's journey through the Gnostic cycle in *Paradise Lost* (descent) and *Paradise Regained* (ascent). When the Son returns to his Father after creating the world, Milton writes:

The Filial Power arrived, and sat him down
With his great Father; for he also went
Invisible, yet staid, (such privilege
Hath omnipresence) and the work ordained,
Author and End of all things; and, from work
Now resting, blessed and hallowed the seventh day,
As resting on that day from all his work,
But not in silence holy kept.⁴²

This moment reaffirms that it was in fact the Son who created the world, not the Father. And now, he has returned to the throne, post-creation and with his physical descent to Earth now complete. We discuss below how Milton's Son bears a further parallel with the materially creative archons as the Son, like the archons, is more materialist and outward-facing in Milton. Both Milton's Son and the archons initiate creation, and do so only through their lower, more materialist nature relative to those higher on the celestial hierarchy (God/Father; Invisible Spirit).

This view of a descending, autonomous, and materially creative lower order being is widespread in Milton's likely Gnostic sources (Irenaeus; Tertullian; Plotinus) and is a marked departure from a variety of so-called orthodox sources available to Milton – ancient, medieval, and contemporary alike. Irenaeus writes of the Gnostic view that creation occurs due to the demiurge who exists outside and below the pleroma, in contradistinction to Irenaeus's view that creation occurred solely by the Father through the Word.⁴³ Tertullian variously and similarly ascribes the Gnostic understanding of creation of material bodies to the demiurge who exists outside the pleroma, which sees Jesus as materially descending and our physical bodies of a lower, separate order.⁴⁴

Milton's account of descending creation through the Son doesn't only find parallels in Gnosticism. Indeed, creation by emanation is broadly found in Platonism, and more specifically in later Neoplatonic thought such as Plutarch and Plotinus – the latter of whom we may recall wrote an entire section of his

⁴² Milton, *Parad. Lost* 7.587–594 (Teskey 2004).

⁴³ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.2–3.

⁴⁴ Tert., *Val.* 20, 24, 26–27, 39.

Enneads in explicit polemical engagement with Gnostic thinking.⁴⁵ Plotinus, in a clear contrast to his own more positivist, Neoplatonic views of creation, polemicizes against the Gnostic view of creation as imperfect and stemming not from the universe's pure nature but from an active presence that descends and is materially separate from the world soul.⁴⁶ All three of Milton's likely Gnostic sources (Irenaeus; Tertullian; Plotinus), in other words, provide clear Gnostic views around creation that closely parallel the distinct elements of Milton's own account in *Paradise Lost*.

Meanwhile, Neoplatonism may indeed provide our best explanation for Milton's monism, where everything derives from and returns to ("If not deprav'd from good") the "one first matter all."⁴⁷ In such a monistic system, all things are both spirit and body but in different degrees. It is a hierarchical universe akin to Neo/Platonizing frameworks, where "more spiritous" things are closer to God, but it also contains a pathway for all bodies "up to spirit work" or "by gradual scale sublime'd":

one Almighty is, from whom
 All things proceed, and up to him return,
 If not deprav'd from good, created all
 Such to perfection, one first matter all,
 Indu'd with various forms, various degrees
 Of substance, and in things that live, of life;
 But more refin'd, more spiritous, and pure,
 As neerer to him plac't or neerer tending
 Each in thir several active Sphears assignd,
 Till body up to spirit work, in bounds
 Proportiond to each kind. So from the root
 Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves
 More aerie, last the bright consummate floure
 Spirits odorous breathes: flours and thir fruit
 Mans nourishment, by gradual scale sublimed
 To vital Spirits aspire, to animal,
 To intellectual, give both life and sense,
 Fancie and understanding, whence the Soule
 Reason receives, and reason is her being,

45 *Enn.* 2.9 is often titled "Against the Gnostics" for this reason, though perhaps "Against" might be translated from the Greek *pros* as "Regarding" or "Toward."

46 Plot., *Enn.* 2.9.4–5, 8, 10–11.

47 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 8.471–472 (Teskey 2004).

Discursive, or Intuitive; discourse
 Is ofttest yours, the latter most is ours,
 Differing but in degree, of kind the same.⁴⁸

Perhaps it is here, in one of the most notable passages in *Paradise Lost*, that Neoplatonism provides a better explanation for Milton's ontology and cosmology than Gnosticism. Meanwhile, we can additionally look to the important role afforded Jesus (Milton's "Son") in creation found in other Christian sources doubtless at Milton's fingertips. Most notably, the Gospel of John, itself with Gnostic undertones and strongly influential on subsequent Gnostic texts, foregrounds the role of Jesus in the act of creation in the very first chapter: "The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world / He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not."⁴⁹

Clement of Alexandria expanded these cosmological themes further, as his widely read *Stromata* even engaged Gnostic thinking explicitly in Clement's discussion of creation via Christ. Milton's Gnosticism around his notion of creation via the Son, in other words, was likely only partial. It was undoubtedly complemented or even overshadowed by other prominent sources widely available, though many of these sources themselves were in close conversation with Gnosticism and likely contained some Gnostic influence themselves.

A couple elements of Milton's account, however, seem to be better explained by Gnosticism than Neoplatonism. First, unlike the Neoplatonic "chain of being" where each ontological level gives rise to the other, Milton's Son is directly creative, acting himself as the mediator for earthly creation instead of via successive levels. And second, also unlike Neoplatonic emanations of different beings in more materialist succession, the Son himself physically descends to and among materialist elements which he then esteems.

A similar point can be made with respect to the influence of the Gospel of John. In a clear parallel, both John and Milton see material creation occurring through the Son: in John 1:3, "the world was made through him," while in Milton, "by my Word, begotten Son, by thee / This I perform, speak thou, and be it don: / My overshadowing Spirit and might with thee / I send along."⁵⁰ Yet here we also see a difference. In John, creation occurs literally "through" the Son, with God continuing to act as the creative power. Yet much as we saw above in our comparison with Neoplatonism, the Miltonic account is distinct in

48 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 8.469–490 (Teskey 2004).

49 Gospel of John 1:9–10.

50 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 7.164 (Teskey 2004).

giving a directly creative act to the Son: God “perform[s]” still as with John, but in Milton the Son “speak[s]” and through this act of speaking “be it don.”⁵¹

Our best explanation for Milton’s creative cosmology, in other words, lies at the intersection of influences. Milton’s account contains clear influence of Neoplatonic hierarchy and creative emanations; Milton’s Father also creates through his Son as intermediary in an obvious reflection of the Gospel of John. But Milton’s notable further innovations seem to reflect Gnostic ideas of lower-order, materialist beings acting creatively of their own accord. Milton’s creation is seemingly Gnostic and Neoplatonic and Christian/Johannine all – a fact that should not surprise given Milton’s erudition and eclecticism as well as the extensive historical and conceptual parallels between Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, and Johannine thought.

5 Valuation of Externals: Food, Drink, and Celebration

Taking into consideration the Father’s designation of his Son as Earth’s creator in *Paradise Lost*, it is important to return to Milton’s earlier designation of the Son as “begotten,” occurring in Book 5. In Book 7, through the descent and creation of the Earth, it is clear that Milton’s Son has already become vested and invested in outward, earthy things. We have started to see the manifestation of the Son’s relationship to power: how it is understood, wielded, and desired. This represents a low point in the Gnostic cycle of emanation, creation, and descent on the one hand, and the return to the divine via knowledge and ascent.

Indeed, Gnosticism understands the realization of earthly attachment as the first key step toward *gnosis* and ascent. But it is during the begetting scene that we see this creative ability bestowed on the Son and recognized by other heavenly beings in the first place. This well parallels the Gnostic view that an understanding of celestial hierarchy was a key Gnostic realization in and of itself, as seen, for example, in Nag Hammadi texts such as *The Nature of Rulers* (NHC II, 4), alongside similar and common figurations in Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Plotinus.⁵²

During the begetting scene, the Father anoints the Son as his “right hand,” and commands “All knees in Heaven ... shall confess him Lord” and “Him who disobeys, / me disobeys, breaks union, and that day, / Cast out from

51 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 7.164 (Teskey 2004).

52 E.g., Hyp. Arch. (NHC II, 4 87.23–89.17); Iren., *Haer.* 1.1–2, 7; Tertullian, *Val.* 7–10, 12, 20; Plotinus *Enn.* 2.9.1, 6, 10–11.

God and blessed vision, falls / into utter darkness, deep engulfed."⁵³ Here, the Father anoints the Son and advances his positioning in the heavenly hierarchy, cementing his newfound role as Son by threatening other angels against questioning his extension of the Father's reign.

Though the Son is physically ascending upward in the hierarchy, this is actually an example of a *pistis* ascent because the Father initiated the event. Here, the Father is the one elevating the Son, and the Son is not elevating himself. If this were an example of a true Gnostic ascent, it would have to come internally from the Son, not from outward factors such as the Father's motivations. In other words, although the Son has been propelled upward physically, this action propels him downward and further away from *gnosis*.

In reaction to the Son's *pistis* ascent, the other angels hold a celebration for the Father's decree. During which, they rejoice lavishly and celebrate:

Tables are set, and on a sudden piled
With Angels food, and rubied nectar flows
In pearl, in diamond, and massy gold,
Fruit of delicious vines, the growth of Heaven.
On flowers reposed, and with fresh flowerets crowned,
They eat, they drink.⁵⁴

Here, the angels throw a feast with food and drink, seemingly as an expression of joy for the Son's begetting. However, some scholars have questioned the authenticity of the angel's celebration and point to the Father's earlier condemnation, rather than genuine jubilee, as the motivating factor behind their rejoicing. Bryson himself, for example, comments on the external-facing celebration in honor of the Son's heavenly ascent. He writes the Father's demands seem "to be *daring* any and all to object, to utter the slightest squeak of protest ... [and] anyone who doesn't provide instant and cheerful compliance ... will be cast out without any appeal."⁵⁵ Bryson suggests the angel's celebration is being driven by fear of the Father, rather than happiness for the Son, further questioning the legitimacy of the angel's celebration. In this understanding, the celebration is fear-based, and thus it is an example of an outward, earthly display indicative of *pistis*.

Keeping in mind that the celebration thrown in the Son's honor may be more motivated by fear and obligation rather than joy, the Son's reaction to the cel-

53 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 5.606; 5.608; 5.611–614 (Teskey 2004).

54 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 5.632–637 (Teskey 2004).

55 Bryson 2004, 93, emphasis original.

ebriation further suggests its outward nature. The Son seems oblivious to the possibility that the celebration is not in fact authentic as he “showered / with copious hand, rejoicing in their joy.”⁵⁶ This obliviousness is a key component of the Son’s outward facing nature. Here, the Son appears more vested in the celebration thrown in his honor, rather than the actual honor in the first place. And, in doing so, the Son, rather than the angels, is focusing exclusively on the external celebration. This is especially poignant as we remember the Son’s ascent to the begotten Son was initiated by the Father in the first place, rather than being justified by the Son’s own internal divinity.

Milton’s Son rejoices in this outward celebration despite the fact that he knows better. In Book III, the Son is told that he is exalted not because he was given the power of creation by the Father or outward celebration by the angels, but rather due to the fact that he is willing to humble and lower himself:

Because thou hast, though Thron’d in highest bliss
Equal to God and equally enjoying
God-like fruition, quitted all to save
A World from utter loss, and hast been found
By Merit more then Birthright Son of God
Found worthiest to be so by being Good,
Farr more then Great or High; because in thee
Love hath abounded more then Glory abounds,
Therefore thy Humiliation shall exalt
With thee thy Manhood also to this Throne.⁵⁷

The Son, in other words, is told that his “Merit” comes not from his “Birthright” as “Son of God” but rather he is “worthiest” due to his “being Good” through his embrace of “Humiliation” which will “exalt” him to the “Throne.”⁵⁸ Yet despite being told the fact of the matter in Book III, Book v finds the Son exalting nonetheless in the praise and external objects offered by the angels. The knowledge is there for the Son, but it is not yet internalized to the level of true *gnosis*.

An additional point of consideration for the claim that the angel’s celebration is an example of pisis should be given to Milton’s usage of food in both *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. Earlier, we noted how Bryson pointed to food, specifically bread, as one of the Satanic temptations the Son rejects in *Paradise Regained*. Though, Bryson astutely notes, “it is not the bread that is

⁵⁶ Milton, *Parad. Lost* 5,640–641 (Teskey 2004).

⁵⁷ Milton, *Parad. Lost* 3,305–314 (Teskey 2004).

⁵⁸ Milton, *Parad. Lost* 3,309–314 (Teskey 2004).

the point of the temptation; rather, it is the *means of attaining* that bread. The temptation here is one of identity and power.”⁵⁹

Bryson claims Jesus's rejection of food here is symbolic because it is tied up with his own identity and power and “is an attempt to get the Son to show off.”⁶⁰ Keeping this idea in mind, the Son of *Paradise Lost* uses food and drink as a means to cement his legitimacy as the begotten Son. The Son relies on these externals to derive his identity as the Son and prove his right to his position in the heavenly hierarchy. Such an attempt to claim divine, hierarchical status via externals such as food and drink instead of internal knowledge, however, only shows – from a Gnostic perspective – that this Son in *Paradise Lost* finds himself in a situation of earthly descent instead of Gnostic ascent.⁶¹ We can thus see that the Son's rejoicing in the angel's superficial splendor of food and drink is actually engaging in outward displays of devotion which, according to this Gnostic worldview, is indicative of external *pistis* rather than the internal *gnosis* Bryson argues the Son has arrived to in *Paradise Regained*.

Such Gnostic views commonly appeared in ancient polemics. Irenaeus, for example, asserts that Gnostics held a negative view of materiality and creation more generally due to the demiurge's production; in an even stronger parallel with Milton, Irenaeus also notes the negative Gnostic disposition toward the material world due to its lacking of proper *gnosis*.⁶² Tertullian likewise describes Gnosticism's negative views of materialism in a roughly Platonic, tripartite view, which importantly involves a critique of Christ's materialism that was uncommon in other strands of early Christianity.⁶³ And Plotinus, following his discussion of creation, writes that Gnostics despise material and external objects in this sphere of existence, in contradistinction to Plotinus's more positivist, Neoplatonic views.⁶⁴

Milton depicts the Son of *Paradise Lost* in exactly this situation, seeing the angels' external acclaim and the rejoicing of food and drink as signaling his place in the celestial hierarchy, when in fact the Gnostic worldview shows such acclaim and rejoicing to be detrimental to his ascent and even contributing to

59 Bryson 2016, 121, emphasis in original.

60 Bryson 2016, 121.

61 This Miltonic usage of food in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, as an unnecessary display of outward devotion, is a point noted elsewhere by many Milton scholars. Huntley, for instance, draws parallels between the meal Eve serves Adam and Raphael in the beginning of Book 5 with the meal Satan tempts the Son with in *Paradise Regained* (Huntley 1969, 44–54). For a collection of Milton's discussion on food, see Goldman (1977, 31–37).

62 Iren., *Haer.* 1.7, 2.3.

63 Tert., *Val.* 17, 24–27.

64 Plot., *Enn.* 2.9.14–16.

his Gnostic descent further toward the material realm. To give another example, Milton describes how much of the information discussed in this section is given to Adam in earthly terms specifically so he can understand, despite its heavenly content. In Book 5, Raphael notes that the begetting scene is described in earthly terms so that Adam can understand. Raphael says, “For how shall I relate / To human sense the invisible exploits / Of warring spirits” and “This is dispensed; and what surmounts the reach / of human sense, I shall delineate so, / By likening spiritual to corporal forms, / As may express them best; though what if Earth. Be but a shadow of Heaven, and things therein / Each to other like, more than on earth is thought?”⁶⁵

Milton uses Raphael to describe that the truth of the heavenly realm is non-material, but must be delivered in material terms in order for Adam to attain preliminary understanding (“By likening spiritual to corporal terms”).⁶⁶ As a philosophical monist, Milton is perhaps not so dualistic in his ontology as certain Gnostic groups, but we nonetheless see a privileging of the more spiritual as compared to the more material: some kinds of matter for Milton are more spiritous than others and therefore to be preferred.

Nonetheless, we see that the overall message of this section – that the outwardness of material food, drink, and celebration belies internal, abstract truth – closely hews to the Gnostic worldview, where even divine truths had to sometimes be delivered in material forms such as human bodies or written works. Indeed, Raphael’s explanatory aside would find itself well at home in a Gnostic text that described how immaterial, internal truth could be opened up and delivered by a material form. Milton’s words here read much as a Gnostic teacher, instructing his students that truth can be found via a material message, but that truth is ultimately given in that medium due only to necessity, and that the true Gnostic must transcend such material forms, much as Raphael explains to Adam the ways in which the spiritual realm is largely inaccessible to material sense.

We must conclude this section with an important caution, however. Milton was a monist, which means that he largely understood core, ontological similarities between the physical and the spiritual.⁶⁷ To take but two examples, even Milton’s angels have sex, and because their bodies are more spiritous than ours their union is fuller with more pleasure and joy. Similarly, Milton calls attention to Adam’s and Eve’s physical love-making in Book 4 of *Paradise Lost*.

65 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 5.564–567; 571–576 (Teskey 2004).

66 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 5.573 (Teskey 2004).

67 Donnelly 1999, 79–85; see further Hart 1996, 16–27.

We should not, in other words, extend Gnosticism's negative views of the material world to all of Milton's ideas. Despite important parallels in seeing food and drink as improper and unnecessary displays of outward devotion, Milton's views on materiality are only Gnostic in certain areas. Both recalling our introduction and anticipating our conclusion, we should keep in mind the non-systematic nature of Milton's thinking as well as the many and diverse influences on his thought. Equally important is to recall the non-systematic nature of the category of Gnosticism: despite many dualistic Gnostic groups that were largely ascetic and anti-sex, we also have evidence in our ancient sources, albeit polemic and biased, that there were Gnostic groups who were sexually libertine too.⁶⁸

6 Outwardness and the Son's Raw Power

Just as the Son's food, drink, and celebration pointed toward the Son's valuation of externals, Milton provides a host of other examples that underscore how the Son of *Paradise Lost* – in contrast with the Gnostic internality of Jesus in *Paradise Regained* – is concerned with outwardness and outward expressions of power. A key example of the Son's outwardness arises after hearing Satan's reaction to his begetting. Satan, in an obvious bout of jealousy, casts the Son as “The Great Messiah, and his new commands, / Who speedily through all the hierarchies / Intends to pass triumphant, and give laws” and uses this action as motivation to rebel against the Father and the Son.⁶⁹ The Son immediately responds to Satan's provocations to his Father, saying:

Mighty father, thou thy foes
 Justly hast in derision, and secure,
 Laughest at their vain designs and tumults vain,
 Matter to me of glory, whom their hate
 Illustrates, when they see all regal power
 Given me to quell their pride, and in event
 Know whether I be dexterous to subdue
 Thy rebels, or be found in the worst in Heaven.⁷⁰

68 See most recently Litwa 2021; for an earlier view, Benko 1967; see Buckley 1994.

69 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 5.691–693 (Teskey 2004).

70 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 5.735–742 (Teskey 2004).

Here, the Son threatens vengeance against Satan and the other fallen angels because they do not recognize his reign as legitimate or divine. He is promising to display his “regal power” as a way to force their submission and seek revenge for their mistakes.

This outburst of a threat of raw power is a far cry from the (Gnostic ascending) Jesus of *Paradise Regained*, who knows that Satan’s temptations and tricks are those of *pistis*. Bryson writes that Jesus rejects Satan’s “trying to tempt the Son into adopting, a focus on the physical, the palpable, the external. Satan is trying, in each of his temptations, to get the Son to look outside himself for the Good, and to focus on such external things as if they were ends in themselves.”⁷¹ Yet here, the (Gnostic descending) Son of *Paradise Lost* does not yet have the necessary insight, as in knowledge or *gnosis*, to see Satan’s condemnation as purely external or to realize that Satan is trying to evoke some sort of reaction, which the Son so willingly gives.

Additionally, as the quote above highlights, the Son of *Paradise Lost* insists on engaging with Satan, displaying the Son’s “regal power” to subdue the “rebels.” The Son feels the need to defend, justify, and cement his position in the celestial hierarchy as the begotten Son to Satan, and the only way the Son sees this to be feasible is through sheer, raw power and military action. One of the temptations that Bryson identifies in *Paradise Regained* is the Son’s resistance to military force. Bryson writes, “For the Son, power, authority, and reign are *internal* and to be exercised, not over others, but over oneself.”⁷²

Unlike the (Gnostic ascending) Jesus of *Paradise Regained*, who knows he has does not need to “prove” himself to Satan through externals such as power and authority, the (Gnostic descending) Son of *Paradise Lost* is quick to threaten their use because he does not yet have the internal knowledge to see the outwardness of Satan’s *pistis* remarks. It is clarifying to view Milton’s Son in light of the Gospel of Phillip (NHC II, 3), a Nag Hammadi text unavailable to Milton, which states that “Knowledge is the light by which we ripen”: we see a Son in *Paradise Lost* who has not yet ripened towards *gnosis*, as indicative of a descending, Gnostic state that relies on external valuations and exertions of power instead of internal ones.⁷³

Yet another indication of the Son’s tendency towards outwardness in *Paradise Lost* occurs in Book 6. During the war in heaven, the Father sends the Son on the third day to fight Satan and the other heavenly rebels. In accepting the Father’s demands and agreeing to fight the fallen angels, the Son says:

71 Bryson 2016, 122.

72 Bryson 2016, 126, emphasis original.

73 Gos. Phil. (NHC II, 3) 79:23–24.

O Father, O Supreme of heavenly Thrones,
 First, Highest, Holiest, Best; thou always seek'st
 To glorify thy Son, I always thee,
 As I most just: This is my glory account,
 My exaltation, and my whole delight,
 That thou, in me well pleased, declares thy will
 Fulfullied, which to fulfill is all my bliss
 Scepter and Power, thy giving, I assume,
 And gladlier shall resign, when in the end
 Thou shalt be All in All, and I in thee
 For ever, and in mee all whom thou lov'st.⁷⁴

Here, the Son fulfills the Father's commands so that the Father will be "well pleased" by the Son's actions. The Son accepts this externally-derived charge on the account that it will make the Father happy and well pleased with him, as opposed to fulfilling the demands because the Son knows internally that is what needs to be done for the well-being of both mankind and heaven. The Son will gladly accept the Father's "Scepter and Power" and even give it up ("And gladlier shall resign"), not for his own growth but for the fulfillment of God's plan and the reception of God's love: "in the end / Thou shalt be All in All, and I in thee / For ever, and in mee all whom thou lov'st."⁷⁵

Essentially, the Son is acting in the name of receiving external validation and praise from the Father, and furthermore sees this act of fighting and war as a means to attain those externals. This is yet another indication that the Son of *Paradise Lost* has not yet received the internal knowledge to know that externals like praise and validation are nothing but distractions and detract from a true state of *gnosis*. As Bryson argued, this very recognition (*gnosis*) around the emptiness of external valuation is what the Son will achieve in his Gnostic ascent throughout the course of the following *Paradise Regained*.

It should also be noted that in Book 3, the Son does volunteer to be the Savior of mankind on the account of Adam and Eve's sins – a moment that is undoubtedly an example of an inward turn. In anticipation of the duo's future sins, Milton's Father asks for a heavenly sacrifice to bear the brunt of their transgressions. The Son quickly offers himself, in a moment of self-begetting, saying,

74 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 6.723–733 (Teskey 2004).

75 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 6.731–733 (Teskey 2004).

Behold me then: me for him, life for life
 I offer: on me let thine anger fall;
 Account me, Man; I for his sake will leave
 Thy bosom, and this glory next to thee
 Freely put off, and for him lastly die
 Well pleased; on me let Death wreak all his rage.⁷⁶

Here, the Son appears much more inward than the Son we identified in the preceding paragraphs. Yet it is important to note that it is specifically Adam and Eve who spark the necessity for a savior, which the Son volunteers to be. Thus, without Adam and Eve's transgressions we would not see the Son begin an upward trajectory towards *gnosis*. The Son, in other words, has made Gnostic progress, but still lacks the internal impetus for doing so which is essential to a fully Gnostic realization: the Son needs the external impetus Adam and Eve to make progress, whereas true *gnosis* arises from within.

Milton's intriguing and distinct depiction of the Son as ignorantly embracing the outward trappings of power (*pistis*) instead of coming to his own, inner realization of non-materialist worth (*gnosis*) find several parallels in his likely Gnostic sources. Indeed, the ancient polemics against Gnosticism include this same general idea, even as the Gnostic focus on anti-materialism, temperance, and simple living found ready parallel in other philosophical and religious wisdom traditions like Judaism, Christianity, Stoicism, and Neo-Platonism. Key to this parallel is the role of ignorance, which privileges outwardness and power instead of privileging *gnosis*.

According to Milton's likely sources, the Creator being of Gnostic cosmology is critiqued for his ignorance of the nature of creation, of the high God himself, and especially of his own nature. Irenaeus and Tertullian both make this point, Irenaeus focusing on ignorance around the nature of creation and God himself and Tertullian focusing on the demiurge being ignorant of his own nature and especially the Father.⁷⁷ Plotinus, meanwhile, highlights the importance Gnostics afforded to simple food and temperance.⁷⁸ Milton's implied and distinct critiques of the Son in *Paradise Lost* – as ignorant of true power, of the origins and nature of his own power, of the lack of value in food, drink, and celebration – all find ready parallel in Milton's ancient sources on Gnosticism.

⁷⁶ Milton, *Parad. Lost* 3.235–240 (Teskey 2004).

⁷⁷ Tert., *Val.* 2.6, 19, 28.

⁷⁸ Plot. *Enn.* 2.9.14; cf. 2.9.9.

7 Eve and Sophia

In this final section, we explore in greater depth how Milton's Adam and especially Eve function as catalysts for the Son's ascent in *Paradise Regained*. In both Milton and Gnostic thought, there is a key female figure who represents the nadir in the Gnostic cycle of descent and ascent. In Milton this figure is Eve, in Gnosticism it is Sophia. In both thought systems, Eve and Sophia function to bring materialistic, Gnostic descent to their lowest point, but in doing so also plant the seeds of subsequent, Gnostic ascent toward redemption and true knowledge.

While the Miltonic Eve and Gnostic Sophia can be understood in negative terms, as their transgressions bring materialist descent to its lowest possible points, they can also be understood positively, as creating the necessary conditions for Gnostic reconciliation and redemption. For Milton, Eve becomes the catalyst for the Son's upward trajectory when the Son expresses mercy for Eve and Adam in the final books. For Gnosticism, Sophia similarly catalyzes the Gnostic ascent upward through her sinful descent toward external materialism as well as her repentance based on her recognition of her sinful descent which in certain accounts is tied to the redemptive Christ figure.

The intersection between Eve and the Gnostic Sophia has been noted elsewhere.⁷⁹ This other scholarship on Eve and Sophia, however, has discussed the intersection between Sophia and the biblical Eve. We argue, meanwhile, that the specifically Miltonic Eve bears extended, different, and notably striking similarities with the Gnostic Sophia. In this way, Milton's Eve is similar to Milton's Son in reflecting certain aspects of a distinctly Gnostic worldview. Indeed, just as we made the case above for Milton's Son being more Gnostic than the biblical version, we make a similar claim here: we argue that that Milton's Eve is even more Gnostic and reflective of a Gnostic worldview than the biblical Eve.

Indeed, for both Milton's Son and Eve we see the key role of *gnosis* or inner knowledge function as the key to either removal from or contact with God. As Milton's Son and Eve both grow toward inner knowledge, they function in very human ways that are novel to Milton and seemingly reflective of a Gnostic view of a savior figure or salvation more broadly.

Specifically, we find Milton's Eve to be even more Gnostic than the biblical Eve in four ways. First, Milton's Eve is the first to repent, similar to Sophia's acknowledgement of her wrongdoings. Second, both Milton's Eve and Gnostic Sophia are understood as finding worth in external beauty. Third, and related to

⁷⁹ See Rasimus 2009 and Gilhwa 1985.

the second, there is a clear overlap in motivations for Milton's Eve and Sophia committing their respective transgressions. Both Milton's Eve and Sophia want to advance in the hierarchy, but only have access to knowledge that is superficial and therefore more indicative of *pistis* (external value) instead of *gnosis* (internal value). Indeed, Bryson argues much the same in his own chapter with respect to the Son.⁸⁰ Fourth and finally, Milton's Eve and the Gnostic Sophia both commit transgressions which ultimately spark the necessity for a savior.

Before proceeding through each of these points, we must provide a caveat around our claims for Gnostic influence, much as we did above in noting the complementary influences of Christian and Neo-Platonic thought around certain of Milton's ideas like creation. In this case, the most likely non-Gnostic influence comes from the apocryphal group of writings known as the Life of Adam and Eve.⁸¹ Dating from the first few centuries of the common era and surviving in different forms and manuscript traditions, the Latin version was widely read in the ancient and medieval periods and doubtless available in some form to Milton.⁸² Notable for the unique and extended discussion of Adam and Eve after they eat the forbidden fruit, the LAE tradition offers another likely influence on Milton's thought. Where relevant, we note below this influence as complementary to our arguments around Gnosticism.

7.1 *Repentance and Acknowledgement of Error in Book 10*

In The Apocryphon of John (available to and quoted by Irenaeus), Sophia repents after initiating the creation of the material world through her child, Ialdabaoth. It reads:

[W]hen [Sophia] recognized the wickedness that had taken place and the robbery her son had committed, she repented. She became forgetful in the darkness of ignorance, she began to be ashamed ... When the Mother realized that the trappings of darkness had come into being imperfectly, she understood that her partner had not collaborated with her. She repented with many tears.⁸³

Realizing she has disrupted the divine hierarchy by being motivated by external desires, she repents and asks for forgiveness, which is subsequently given

80 Bryson 2016, 119–120.

81 Particular thanks to the astute, anonymous reviewer of this article who made this connection and noted several useful and substantive areas of overlap.

82 See Revard 2005, 84.

83 Ap. John (NHC II,1) 13.13–14.13.

to her. The same account is found in Irenaeus and Tertullian, for example in Irenaeus's account that when Sophia "looked upon" her creation, "her first feeling was one of grief, on account of the imperfection of its generation, and then of fear lest this should end her own existence ... she at last changed her mind, and endeavored to return anew to the Father ... and she became a suppliant of the Father."⁸⁴ Sophia disobediently disrupted the divine order through her own ignorance and/or ambition, and only after extensive negative emotion and reflection does she come around to asking for repentance.

Nicola Denzey Lewis provides an extensive account of Sophia's repentance and notes its relevance as "important because Sophia represents the repentance and conversion of individual Christians. Sophia's repentance also sets the stage for the great teaching and revelation of the First Man in human form (presumably – although the text does not say for sure – this First Man is both Jesus and Adam)."⁸⁵ As Lewis notes, the Gnostic creation myth of Sophia acted as a model for Christian repentance, which we see from Milton's Eve as well.

Similar to Sophia's act of repentance, Milton's Eve is the first of the original pair to acknowledge her sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. In Book 10, Adam and Eve contemplate their options and argue with each other as they await their fate. The pair consider committing suicide as a means to avoid heavenly wrath, but Eve instead finally takes full responsibility for her actions. Eve says:

Both have sinned; but thou
Against God only; I against God and thee;
And to the place of judgement will return,
There with my cries importune Heaven; that all
The sentence, from thy head removed, may light
On me, sole cause to thee all this woe;
Me, me only, just object of his ire.⁸⁶

In this moment, Eve takes full responsibility for her sin in eating from the tree as well as in tempting Adam to eat alongside her. This characteristic is distinctive to Milton's Eve, as the biblical Eve does not acknowledge her role in eating from the tree of knowledge.

Notably, this is the first time in *Paradise Lost* that Eve focuses inwardly, which allows her to realize the necessity for repentance and to ask for the Father's

84 Iren., *Haer.* 1.2.1.

85 Lewis 2013, 159.

86 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 10.930–936 (Teskey 2004).

forgiveness. Milton's Eve recognizes her desires were previously outward and an attempt to gain *pistis* knowledge. Similar to Milton's Son, Eve's previous and outward-looking self has resulted in descent and distance from God, which can only be helped through a knowledge of self that arrives fully from within.

Like Milton's Eve, Sophia in The Apocryphon of John also comes to a similar realization, as "[Her son, Ialdaboath] was ignorant, for he thought no one existed except his mother alone. When he saw the throng of angels he had created, he exalted himself over them."⁸⁷ Subsequently, Sophia repents as she "recognized the wickedness that had taken place and the robbery her son had committed."⁸⁸ As Sophia's desire to create a being occurred without the Invisible Spirit's consent, her error is both outward and material in nature; much the same can be said for the similar accounts of Sophia in Irenaeus and Tertullian mentioned above. Much as we see with the outward desire of Milton's Eve, both Eve and Sophia come to the realization that they acted externally, and as such, both figures make an effort to repent to a higher being.

It is this realization and repentance that allows both Sophia and Eve to change their trajectories in the Gnostic cycle. Indeed, recognition of dwelling at the bottom of Gnostic descent is the crucial first step toward beginning an upward ascent back towards *gnosis*, which both Milton's Eve and the Gnostic Sophia have strayed from in their respective transgressions. Just as Sophia represents repentance and conversion of Christians, so too does Milton's Eve represent Milton's similar view of repentance of humankind more broadly within his (highly atypical) Christian thought world.

We can find other parallels for Milton's account in the Latin version, where we see a similar, first realization by Eve. As Revard describes it, "[i]n the Latin *Vita*, Eve tells her husband that it is because of her that God is angry with him. She suggests that he kill her so that God's wrath toward him might be abated ... the first of several occasions when Eve takes the blame for the fall and attempts to make amends."⁸⁹ It is only through Eve's actions that both her and Adam begin to seek penitence. In a difference between the LAE and Milton, however, the goal of the LAE's Eve is reconciliation with Adam and the renewal of the marriage bond; by contrast, Milton's Eve – like the Gnostic Sophia – is directed toward redemption and salvation more broadly. The LAE's Eve and Adam remain focused on the outward sacrament of marriage while Milton, also befitting his critiques of Catholic rules around marriage, looks to the wider notion of redemption itself.

87 Ap. John (NHC II,1) 13.13–14.13.

88 Ap. John (NHC II,1) 13.13–14.13.

89 Revard 2005, 87.

Revard further notes that “[u]nlike most other redactors of the Genesis story, Milton makes revelation part of the Eden experience.”⁹⁰ But while Revard understands revelation as prophecy, the notion of revelation as divine realization is equally explicable as *gnosis*. Indeed, unlike the penitence tied to the sacrament of marriage found in the LAE, especially as mediated by the Catholic traditions of late antique and medieval Christianity, Revard notes that Milton’s account specifically “connects penitence with revelation.”⁹¹ Indeed, Milton’s revelation is forward-looking, anticipating the coming of the Son and redemption for all, a clear departure from the emphases of the LAE narratives that maintain their focus on Adam and Eve.⁹²

In the LAE literature, furthermore, it is Adam who is forgiven first, who in turn forgives Eve, thereby “renewing the contract of marriage between them,” and the narrative concludes with the placement of Adam and Eve in heaven.⁹³ By contrast, Milton – in a distinctly Gnostic way more reflective of Sophia – looks above and beyond these specific figures and the bond of marriage to the Son himself and a broader notion of redemption from wickedness. The Sophia of Irenaeus similarly finds redemption and a sort of marital “conjunction,” but Irenaeus and Milton depart from the LAE literature in not stopping at this conjunction but rather expanding the account toward a cosmic, redemptive narrative around the Son/Christ.⁹⁴

7.2 *Beauty*

Another parallel between Milton’s Eve and Sophia lies in the valuation of external beauty, in similar fashion to the Son’s valuation of externals, food, drink, and celebration discussed above. Tertullian in particular notes Gnostic views around Sophia’s focus on her beauty and its loss as reflective of her ignorance, lack of *gnosis*, and fall away from the Father into materialism.⁹⁵ More clearly in *The Nature of Rulers* (NHC II, 4) (unavailable to Milton), “the authorities of darkness became enamored” by “[Sophia’s] image appear[ing] in the

90 Revard 2005, 93.

91 Revard 2005, 95.

92 Cf. Revard’s conclusions: “By the end of book 12, our interest has shifted from Adam and Eve to Christ ... In this Milton has chosen to depart in a significant way from the story told in the various *Lives of Adam and Eve*” (Revard 2005, 101).

93 Revard 2005, 88.

94 Iren., *Haer.* 1.2.4: “Sophia was purified and established, while she was also restored to her proper conjunction”.

95 Tert., *Val.* 9–10; cf. 23. Some translate “beauty” to begin 10. Riley opts for “she was all bent out of shape, because of her paleness, thinness and neglect” (Riley 1971, 87–88).

waters.”⁹⁶ Similar to how the Gnostic Sophia’s beauty captures the attention of “the authorities of darkness,” Milton meditates on Eve’s outward beauty, suggesting a lack of merit in her internal qualities. Milton describes Eve as such:

She, as a veil, down to the slender waist
Her unadorned golden tresses wore
Dishevelled, but in wanton ringlets waved
As the vine curls her tendrils, which implied
Subjection, but required with gentle sway,
And by her yielded with coy submission, modest pride,
And sweet, reluctant, amorous delay.⁹⁷

Unlike Adam, whom Milton describes as “the goodliest man of men since borne His Sons,” Milton focuses his description of Eve solely on her external traits, a notable contrast.⁹⁸ This contrast furthermore highlights Eve’s position in the heavenly hierarchy, as her own focus on external beauty instead of internal qualities is reflected in her submissiveness to both Adam and other heavenly beings.

However, Milton’s gender hierarchy isn’t always so clear. In Book IV, Milton writes of both Eve and Adam as sharing sets of traits:

Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,
Godlike erect, with native Honour clad
In naked Majestie seemd Lords of all,
And worthie seemd, for in thir looks Divine
The image of thir glorious Maker shon,
Truth, wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure,
Severe but in true filial freedom plac’d;
Whence true authority in men; though both
Not equal, as thir sex not equal seemd
For contemplation hee and valour formd,
For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Hyp. Arch. (NHC II,4) 86, 27–87, 23.

⁹⁷ Milton, *Parad. Lost* 4.304–311 (Teskey 2004).

⁹⁸ Milton, *Parad. Lost* 4.323–324 (Teskey 2004).

⁹⁹ Milton, *Parad. Lost* 4. 288–298 (Teskey 2004).

Adam and Eve are here a pair with the same external attributes and internal qualities. They are both “erect and tall” and in both “The image of thir glorious Maker shon, / Truth, wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure.”¹⁰⁰ But then Milton goes on to explicitly declare that they are “Not equal.” Eve is both less and more than Adam – less contemplative and valorous (“For contemplation hee and valour formed”), but filled with more grace and attraction (“For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace”) – much as Sophia, as we will see, is both less and more than other divine figures in Gnostic cosmology.¹⁰¹

Perhaps the most direct parallel on beauty between Milton's Eve and Gnostic Sophia comes from Book IV, when Eve first sees herself. Eve says:

I thither went
 With unexperienced thought, and laid me down
 On the green bank, to look into the clear
 Smooth lake, that to me seemed another sky,
 As I bent down to look, just opposite
 A shape within the watery gleam appeared,
 Bending to look on me: I started back,
 It started back; but pleased I soon returned,
 Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks
 Of sympathy and love: There I had fixed
 Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire.¹⁰²

In this particular moment we see that Eve's valuation of her external beauty as her internal vanity shows through as “vain desire.” Sophia's parallel valuation of external beauty arises in the fact that Eve is evaluating and valuing her image as it appears in water, notably similar to how Sophia's image was seen in *The Nature of the Rulers* (NHC II, 4).¹⁰³ And while Tertullian doesn't describe Sophia's reflection in water, he intriguingly ties Sophia's fall and sadness to water through “her tears [from which] the whole world of waters flowed.”¹⁰⁴

Because neither Eve nor Sophia yet have the internal ability to realize how their outward presentation is irrelevant, their valuation is instead based on

100 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 4.291–292 (Teskey 2004).

101 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 4.296–298 (Teskey 2004).

102 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 454–464 (Teskey 2004).

103 Hyp. Arch. (NHC II,4) 86.27–87.23.

104 Riley 1971, 95; also cf. 24, and again note 10's tie between Sophia's removal from the Father and the degradation of her physical appearance.

their physical being rather than their internal being, which thus distances them even further from true *gnosis*. The use of water for both drives home their shared contrast between physical versus internal being, with water acting as a metaphor for how their beauty is only a partial and imperfect reflection subject to distortion.

In addition to these parallels concerning outward beauty, a further, related parallel occurs around the description of Milton's Eve as "wise." Milton writes, "Her own, that what she wills to do or say, / Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetist, best: / All higher knowledge in her presence falls / Degraded; Wisdom in discourse with her / Loses discountenanced, and like Folly shows."¹⁰⁵ Here, Milton's Eve is equated with wisdom as she "*seems* wisest, virtuouest, discreetist, best" (emphasis added). It should be noted that, in this moment, Eve has not yet committed the first sin and eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, nor has she repented and understood the magnitude of her action. Thus, during this description of Eve's wisdom, she has not yet shown internal characteristics indicative of *gnosis*, and this wisdom seems to be more reflective of *pistis* knowledge, namely knowledge of external objects.

Much as with the beauty of Milton's Eve and the Gnostic Sophia, the apparent value of the external world is in fact detrimental to divine ascent and true, internal knowledge (*gnosis*). The same can be said for parallels with Milton's Son, whose position in the heavenly hierarchy was given to him by the Father. The Son, we may recall, triumphantly received external valuations of food, drink, and celebration unaware of their superficial value (*pistis*) as opposed to the Son's eventual coming around toward an awareness of his need to sacrifice himself (*gnosis*).¹⁰⁶

Meanwhile, in parallel with the description of Milton's Eve's wisdom indicating *pistis*, throughout *The Nature of Rulers* (NHC II, 4) Sophia is continuously described as "Pistis Sophia." Similarly, she is referred to as "Pistis Sophia" in *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II, 5). Perhaps even more striking, the Askew Codex contains a text titled *Pistis Sophia*, in which the divine being Sophia acts primarily in the twelve material aeons before ascending to the thirteenth.¹⁰⁷ In contrast to the Sophia of *The Apocryphon of John*, the Sophia of the Askew Codex is fully material, descending into lower material orders, and it is only through Jesus's ascent that she can rise to the thirteenth aeon, itself still out-

¹⁰⁵ Milton, *Parad. Lost* 8.549–553 (Teskey 2004).

¹⁰⁶ Cf. prior argument and conclusions in the section on "Outwardness and the Son's Raw Power," discussing Milton, *Parad. Lost* 3.235–240.

¹⁰⁷ *Pistis Sophia* (AC I and II).

side the fully divine realm of light.¹⁰⁸ However, these explicit nomenclature parallels are not universal: Sophia is not described as “Pistis Sophia” in *The Apocryphon of John*, for example, a reflection of the non-uniformity of ancient Gnostic thought and texts.

7.3 *Motivations (External Pistis Instead of Internal Gnosis)*

Within the broader overlap of the Gnostic Sophia and Milton's Eve both emphasizing external matters, a major parallel occurs in their motivations to advance themselves in the heavenly hierarchy. Indeed, this shared motivation of hierarchical advancement is what motives both to commit their respective sins. Both Milton's Eve and the Gnostic Sophia seek knowledge outwardly in an attempt to advance themselves upward, instead of drawing out internal knowledge more organically. Again, we also see parallels between Milton's Eve and Son in *Paradise Lost*, who spends most of his time acclaiming outward hierarchy instead of, and before, coming to an internal realization of internal knowledge around sacrifice and true power.

For the Gnostic Sophia, she seeks knowledge elsewhere from the “Invisible Spirit,” and goes on to create another being in an attempt to gain knowledge. *The Apocryphon of John* relays these events and says of her transgression:

Now, Sophia, who is the Wisdom of Insight and who constitutes an aeon, conceived of a thought from herself, with the conception of the Invisible Spirit and Foreknowledge. She wanted to bring forth something like herself, without the consent of the Spirit, who had not given approval, without her partner and without his consideration. The male did not give his approval. She did not find her partner, and she considered this without the Spirit's consent and without the knowledge of her partner. Nonetheless, she gave birth.¹⁰⁹

The Gnostic Sophia seeks outward knowledge as a means to advance herself upward in the heavenly hierarchy, and in doing so she accidentally initiates the creation of the material world. Furthermore, she does “without the consent of the Spirit,” a transgression against a higher heavenly power with clear parallels to Milton's Eve in *Paradise Lost*.

We see the same cosmological and cosmogonic story across Milton's likely sources, ranging from the story of Sophia's descent and production in Ire-

108 Pistis Sophia (AC) 1–2.29–82. For more extensive discussion on Pistis Sophia and the unique characteristics of this Gnostic Sophia, see Evans 2015, esp. 8–9.

109 Ap. John (NHC II,1) 9.25–10.19.

naeus and Tertullian, to Plotinus's view of Sophia as the product of materialistic descent.¹¹⁰ All three of Milton's sources generally see Sophia (often rendered Achamoth) in a coherent way following the account in The Apocryphon of John, as descending, often due to ignorant accident or ambition, which results in materialism and materialistic creation, which indeed results in Christ's redemptive actions.¹¹¹

Milton's Eve is placed below Adam in the human hierarchy, shown through Adam's depiction of her:

at least on her bestowed
Too much of ornament, in outward show
Elaborate, of inward less exact.
For well I understand in the prime end
Of Nature her the inferior, in the mind
And inward faculties, which most excel;
In outward also her resembling less
His image who made both, and less expressing
The character of that dominion given
O'er other creatures.¹¹²

Here, Adam himself comments on Eve's external "ornament" and her being "inferior, in the mind," to him.¹¹³ This lowly status is what motivates Eve to try and establish power for herself in Paradise by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, which Bryson notes is an attempt to gain outward knowledge. Bryson writes, "Satan is able to focus both Eve and Adam on externals – for Eve, knowledge as a means to gain a greater place in the hierarchy of two."¹¹⁴

Eve looks outwardly to gain knowledge and advance herself in the hierarchy, and falls victim to Satan's tricks because of it. If she had focused internally, she would have realized that knowledge needs to come within to be considered legitimate. Like the Gnostic Sophia and her violation of the will and consent of the "Invisible Spirit" of The Apocryphon of John or the ignorant and ambitious Sophia of Irenaeus and Tertullian, Milton's Eve seeks superficial knowledge outwardly and in doing so disobeys the Father's commands.

¹¹⁰ Iren., *Haer.* 1.4.1; 10, 13, 17; Plot., *Enn.* 2.9.10.

¹¹¹ E.g., Iren., *Haer.* 1.2, 4.1; 2.12, 18; Tert., *Val.* 9–10, 23; Plot. 2.9.10.

¹¹² Milton, *Parad. Lost* 8.537–546 (Teskey 2004).

¹¹³ Milton, *Parad. Lost* 7.541 (Teskey 2004).

¹¹⁴ Bryson 2016, 120.

7.4 *Transgressions Key to the Saviour's Ascent*

The final parallel between Milton's Eve and the Gnostic Sophia is that both of their outward transgressions spark the necessity for a savior and thereby function as catalysts for subsequent salvation. In *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve's sin allow the Son to transition to his role as the savior and therefore redeem humankind. In Book XI, the Son intervenes on their behalf to the Father and asks him to accept the pair's repentance. Milton writes,

Unskilful with what words to pray, let mee
Interpret for him, mee his Advocate
And propitiation, all his works on mee
Good or not good ingraft, my Merit those
Shall perfect, and for these my Death shall pay.¹¹⁵

Here, the Son acts as a proxy for the pair and passes on their pleas of repentance to the Father. Because the pair's repentance arises internally and authentically, and therefore justifiably in a Gnostic view, the Son is able to pass it along to the Father in an attempt to help them. We might recall here both similarities and differences between Milton and the LAE literature of Adam and Eve. In a similarity largely unique in the western tradition, the Adam and Eve of both Milton and the LAE focus on repentance and penitence in order to address their transgression. On the other hand, however, we see here how Milton's narrative of Eve's and Adam's redemption resolves in Christ, whereas the LAE literature resolves in Adam and Eve again unified in marriage, standing in heaven.

Additionally, and more critically, meanwhile, Milton's Son then offers himself as a sacrifice, saying "these my Death shall pay." It is only here that we begin to see that Adam and Eve's transgressions – which at a surface level are highly negative outcomes – actually stimulate the Son's own turn inward. Due to these transgressions, the Son selflessly offers himself to save the pair, a reflection on the Son's focus away from external hierarchy and toward internal value. This is no longer a Son who is obsessed with outward things, but rather a Son knows that true knowledge (*gnosis*) is only to be judged and found within. This inward turn has even broader positive consequences, for the Son's inward turn subsequently results in salvation for humanity more broadly due to his sacrifice. It is only through Eve's initial sin, in other words, that the Son is able to begin an upward trajectory of Gnostic ascent that Bryon identifies in *Paradise Regained*.

¹¹⁵ Milton, *Parad. Lost* 11.32–36 (Teskey 2004).

Gnostic thought similarly depicts transgressive fall and subsequent ascent around the crucial figure of Sophia. Plotinus, for example, recounts the centrality of Sophia in the Gnostic cosmogony of descent and creation, who not only precipitated the descent of the Creator (demiurge) to its nadir of materialism but also precipitated in turn its subsequent ascent:

They first maintain that the Soul and a certain "Wisdom" [Sophia] declined and entered this lower sphere ... then they tell us that the other Souls came down in the descent and that these members of Sophia took to themselves bodies, human bodies, for example.... Then, they shape an image of that image somewhere below – through the medium of Matter or of Materiality or whatever else of many names they choose to give it in their frequent change of terms, invented to darken their doctrine – and so they bring into being what they call the Creator or Demiurge, then this lower is severed from his Mother [Sophia] and becomes the author of the Cosmos down to the latest of the succession of images constituting it.¹¹⁶

On the Origin of the World (NHC II,5) (not available to Milton) gives us a typically Gnostic depiction of creation through a lesser-order being, here Sophia:

The birth of the instructor happened like this. When Sophia let a drop of light fall, it landed on the water, and at once there appeared an androgynous human being. Sophia first made the drop into the form of a female body, and then she took the body and gave it a shape like the Mother who had appeared.¹¹⁷

As noted in the previous section, Sophia's creative act was performed transgressively, without the consent of the Invisible Spirit. Here, we see that this transgressive act nonetheless imbued creation with at least a seed of light, what is in effect the potential for Gnostic knowledge, ascent, and therefore salvation. The same accounts in the Nag Hammadi material are found across Milton's likely sources in remarkably similar forms, for example with Tertullian noting the same creative Sophia conceiving and birthing a female body, and in Irenaeus's account of Sophia generating offspring whereupon she realized their imperfection, was beset by perplexity and ignorance, and ultimately turned her to the Father for redemption.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Plot., *Enn.* 2.9.10 (MacKenna 1991: 152).

¹¹⁷ Orig. World (NHC II, 5) 112.25–114.4.

¹¹⁸ Tert., *Val.* 9–10, 23; Iren., *Haer.* 1.2.3.

Furthermore, we find in Gnostic thought the notion that the innate potential – the divine “light” – within each flawed, material human helped precipitate the ability, or even necessity, of salvation, be it through the internal act of humanity itself via Gnostic understanding and/or through the help of spirits higher in the celestial hierarchy. The Secret Book of John (NHC II, 1), for example, presents the redemption of humanity not in the Gnostic language of light but in the equally typical Gnostic language of seeds:

For a time the seed remained and helped so that when the spirit descends from the holy realms, it may raise up the seed and heal what it lacks, that the entire realm of Fullness may be holy and lack nothing.¹¹⁹

Here the author describes how the spark of the divine (“seed”) within the material world played an instrumental role, such that “when the spirit descends from the holy realms” it has the potential to make those on earth whole again. The role of the savior, in other words, would be for naught if there did not exist within material creation the inherent possibility of salvation. Sophia's creative act as described in *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II, 5) and in Irenaeus's description, though transgressive, in fact prefigured and made possible – perhaps even necessary – the salvific act of *gnosis* and Gnostic restoration described in the Secret Book of John (NHC II, 1).

As Irenaeus also writes, “hence they [gnostics] declare material substance had its beginning from ignorance and grief, and fear and bewilderment,” which leads the Father to restore Sophia through the creation of Horos: “by this Horos they declare that Sophia was purified and established, while she was also restored to her proper conjunction.”¹²⁰ The same can be found in Tertullian, and for both Tertullian and Irenaeus the resultant production of Christ – only after and in response to the Sophia narrative – allowed the Father to be properly understood.¹²¹

Both Milton and Gnostic thought therefore foreground the place of transgression within the broader cycle of sinful descent and redemptive ascent. Furthermore, we see that the transgression itself, in both Milton and Gnosticism, has actually laid the foundation for, and even catalyzed, the redemptive act of salvation. This salvation, in both conceptual worlds, begins at the nadir of the cycle of creative descent and redemptive ascent, and progresses

¹¹⁹ Ap. John (NHC II,1) 23.35–25.16.

¹²⁰ Iren., *Haer.* 1.2.3–4 (Roberts 1997, 312).

¹²¹ Tert., *Val.* 10–11; Iren., *Haer.* 1.2.5.

upward through the turn toward inward knowledge (in Milton, of the Son; in Gnosticism, of humanity) and the role of a salvific figure (in Milton, also the Son; in Gnosticism, Christ or spirit(s) higher in the celestial hierarchy, be they Sophia or another unnamed spirit such as found in the Secret Book of John (NHC II, 1) or the accounts of Irenaeus and Tertullian). Again, despite the striking parallels in the core narratives between Milton and the LAE literature, this broader redemptive act of salvation is distinct to Milton and decidedly Gnostic.

This notion of cyclical, salvific descent finds further expression in yet another parallel between Milton's Eve and the Gnostic Sophia, namely through the idea and act of expulsion. As just noted, the transgression of the created world contains the seeds of salvation in both Milton and Gnostic thought. Yet in both conceptual worlds, we see the idea and act of expulsion playing a crucial role in the cycle of salvation. After the repentance of the Gnostic Sophia and Milton's Eve, both figures have their repentances accepted by the Father, though not without some contingencies: due to their transgressions, the Gnostic Sophia and Milton's Eve are no longer allowed to reside in their respective realms in the way they did before.

In The Apocryphon of John, after Sophia repents to the Invisible Spirit and "the holy Spirit poured upon [Sophia] some of the fullness of all," she is still not able to return to her previous realm. The Apocryphon of John continues, saying, "[Sophia] was taken up not to her own eternal realm, but instead to a position above her son. She was to remain in the ninth heaven until she restored what was lacking in herself."¹²² Notably similar contingencies are attached to the restoration of Sophia described in Irenaeus and Tertullian, for example Irenaeus' description that "she herself certainly remained within the Pleroma; but her enthymesis, with its passion, was separated from her by Horos, fenced off, and expelled from that circle."¹²³ Due to the fact Sophia acted outwardly and against the consent of the Invisible Spirit, she is banished from her realm until she could gain the proper internal knowledge to be able to return.

Crucially, however, we see a paradigmatic Gnostic idea, "until she restored what was lacking" – a clear prefiguring of the eventual salvation in the Gnostic cycle, as what is lacking in those lower in the celestial hierarchy return to their origin and source. Irenaeus describes it thusly: "After this substance has been placed outside of the Pleroma of the Aeons, and its mother restored to her proper conjunction ... Christ then instructed them as to the nature of their

¹²² Ap. John (NHC II,1) 13.13–14.13 (Meyer 2006, 149).

¹²³ E.g., Iren., *Haer.* 1.2.3 (Roberts 1997, 312).

conjunction ... he also announced among them what related to the *knowledge* of the Father" (emphasis ours).¹²⁴

Despite the exile of part of Sophia, the Father nonetheless reveals "the reason of their origin and formation [which] was situated in that which may be comprehended regarding him, that is, in the Son [Christ]."¹²⁵ Knowledge (*gnosis*) is granted as a post-exilic possibility, and that knowledge is fundamentally tied to the redemptive Christ who was created only after Sophia's creation, fall, and *gnosis*-epiphany, and indeed created expressly for redemption.¹²⁶

Similarly, we see Adam and Eve banished from paradise after their repentance to the Father. Milton writes of their expulsion from paradise:

But, longer in that Paradise to dwell,
The law I gave to Nature him forbids:
Those pure immortal elements, that know,
No gross, no unharmonious mixture foul,
Eject him, tainted now; and purge him off.¹²⁷

As the pair have acted outwardly, led by Eve's initial transgression, their impure behavior has left them unable to continue residing in paradise. These external desires, like we saw earlier of the Gnostic Sophia, led them further away from the Father both spiritually and physically.

This is true, of course, not only of Milton's Eve but the biblical Eve more generally, as well as the Eve and Adam of the LAE literature, whose desire for the forbidden fruit leads to physical banishment from Eden.¹²⁸ In Milton's account, however, Eve comes to this realization on her own, in contrast to Adam who needs the whisperings of the archangels to understand the magnitude of his sin. Throughout Book 11 and 12, the Father sends the Archangel Michael to Earth to show Adam a vision for the future and what the ramifications are for his sin, prior to escorting both Adam and Eve from paradise.¹²⁹

Michael says to Adam, "I am sent / to show thee what shall come in future days / To thee, and to thy offspring: good with bad."¹³⁰ Prior to embarking on the prophecy Michael "drenched [Eve's] eyes," so she would remain sleeping while

124 Iren., *Haer.* 1.2.4 (Roberts 1997, 312), emphasis added.

125 Iren., *Haer.* 1.2.5 (Roberts, 1997, 313).

126 Iren., *Haer.* 1.2.5.

127 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 11.48–52 (Teskey 2004).

128 Cf. Rasimus's focus on connections by means of *gnosis* and the serpent figure (Rasimus 2009).

129 Cf. discussion around angels and prophecy in Revard 2005, esp. 92–95.

130 Milton, *Parad. Lost* 11.356–358 (Teskey 2004).

Michael showed Adam the vision for the future of humankind.¹³¹ However, it is revealed at the end of *Paradise Lost* that Eve was already aware of the future of mankind and did not need Michael's guidance to understand it, unlike Adam. As the very last speaker in the epic poem, Eve says:

Whence thou returnest, and whither wentest, I know;
 For God is also in sleep; and dreams advise,
 Which he hath sent propitious, some great good
 Presaging, since with sorrow and heart's distress
 Wearied I fell asleep; But now lead on;
 In me is no delay; with thee to go,
 Is to stay here; without thee here to stay,
 Is to go hence unwilling; thou to me
 Art all things under Heaven, all places thou,
 Who for my wilful crime art banished hence.
 This further consolation yet secure
 I carry hence; though all by me is lost,
 Such favour I unworthy am vouchsafed,
 By me the Promised Seed shall all restore.¹³²

In contrast to Adam, Eve has come to the realization on her own that by her “the Promised Seed shall all restore,” and that humankind's future on Earth will not be as gloomy as was expected after her initial transgression – in part due to the Savior who will sacrifice himself for humankind's sins.¹³³

Adam, on the other hand, required visions and prophecies that span two books in *Paradise Lost*, which were facilitated and led by the Archangel Michael. Considering Eve comes to this knowledge independently, it suggests that her knowledge is more authentic and internal in nature in comparison to Adam who had to seek external, outside beings in order to come to the same realization. Thus, Milton's account, in another departure from the LAE literature too, privileges the role of Eve and her internal realization (*gnosis*) over and against Adam's need for direction and guidance from outside forces and their prophecy (such as archangels). Milton's Eve, therefore, stands much closer to the Gnostic Sophia and her own internal realization.

Milton's account stands in marked contrast to the biblical account in Genesis, where the realization of sinfulness occurs by both Eve and Adam together.

¹³¹ Milton, *Parad. Lost* 11.367 (Teskey 2004).

¹³² Milton, *Parad. Lost* 12.610–623 (Teskey 2004).

¹³³ Milton, *Parad. Lost* 12.623 (Teskey 2004).

The account in Genesis involved a realization of nakedness, but not one of sinfulness and transgression. It is the God of Genesis who pointed out their sin and banished both from Eden. Indeed, neither the biblical Adam nor Eve actually come to an internal realization of wrong-doing, even after being confronted and banished by God.¹³⁴ While they admit they have done wrong, this only occurs after being confronted, and there occurs no subsequent self-reflection or turn inward that might prefigure subsequent salvation.

Milton's Eve, by contrast, clearly points toward a Gnostic type of cyclical salvation: Eve makes the internal realization (*gnosis*) of wrong-doing which – in tandem with Adam's less Gnostic and eventual but nonetheless real understanding – point toward their eventual redemption and salvation. The biblical Eve and Adam are quite literally doomed to a dusty, hard life and death; the Miltonic Eve and Adam, because they come to *gnosis*, fit squarely within the Gnostic view of eventual ascent and salvation. Much as we saw the Gnostic Sophia banished “until she restored what was lacking” in the Apocryphon of John, so too do we see in Milton's Eve – more than and even in contrast to Adam – an expulsion that contains the seeds of its eventual restoration.

Ultimately, Milton's account of the redemption of Adam, Eve, and mankind as a whole occur only within a distinctly Gnostic framework of upward reconciliation. Like the Gnostic Sophia, they must specifically show an upward trajectory towards *gnosis* before they can be reunited with heaven and the Father. In the final book of *Paradise Lost*, Michael relays to Adam that mankind may yet again be reunited with heaven and that the Son will return to Earth:

To judge the unfaithful dead, but to reward
His faithful, and receive them into bliss,
Whether in Heaven or Earth; for then the Earth
Shall all be Paradise, far happier place
Than this of Eden, and far happier days.¹³⁵

Michael says that the faithful and followers of Christianity will be able to be reunited in Heaven once again when the Son has returned to pass judgement on mankind. Michael notes it is only the faithful who will have this opportunity, which suggests that these followers must have the necessary internal knowledge to be able to join the Heaven/Earth reconciliation. Like the Gnostic Sophia, mankind must restore what Adam and Eve lost in order to return

¹³⁴ Gen. 3:8–13.

¹³⁵ Milton, *Parad. Lost* 12.461–465 (Teskey 2004).

to their initial, higher realm. Milton's notion of redemption is not only reminiscent of Gnosticism in its cyclic descent and ascent, but is also predicated on the achievement of internal knowledge for the final step in reconciliation.

8 Milton's Gnosticism in Sum

We are now in a place where we can complete the Gnostic cycle of descent and ascent from our initial discussion of Bryson, using the four main headings that guided this article. In Section 1, we identify Milton's Son's creation of the world as closely reflecting the Gnostic creation myth. Instead of the Father creating the world, like God does in the traditional Book of Genesis, Milton's Father passes this responsibility to the Son, a materialist-oriented figure through whom the material world is created. As we also noted, this top-down style of emanation is characteristically Gnostic – as well as Neo-Platonic and Johannine – particularly with the function of the Son paralleling that of a creative archon. Milton's view of creation thus occurs in a sort of esoteric Christian confluence, with Gnosticism providing the distinct view that Milton's creation occurs at the hands of a lower order, flawed, and materialist Son. These elements create distance between Milton's Gnostic views and other historical, Christian views of creation through Jesus as found, for example, in the Gospel of John and Patristics sources, both of which largely conflate a perfect Jesus with a divine Logos.

In sections 2 and 3, we examine the downward trajectory of the Son, which occurred after his physical descent from heaven via the act of creation that we discussed in Section One. Through this act and material descent, the Son of *Paradise Lost* thus becomes outward-facing and places value on external things such as food, drink, celebrations and outward expressions of raw power. At this stage, the Son does not yet have the ability to look inward for true knowledge, which he only gains and uses to advance upward throughout the course of Milton's sequel volume *Paradise Regained*.

Lastly, we draw parallels between Milton's Eve and the Gnostic Sophia, as further reflecting the conceptual parallels between Milton's account and Gnostic ideas, especially relative to the biblical account. In these parallels between the Miltonic Eve and Gnostic Sophia, there arises further overlap in the necessity for a savior, as both Milton and Gnosticism understand transgressions as necessary to lay the foundation for later salvation. This, for Milton, is what propels his Son upward and into the Gnostic ascent Bryson identifies in the later *Paradise Regained*.

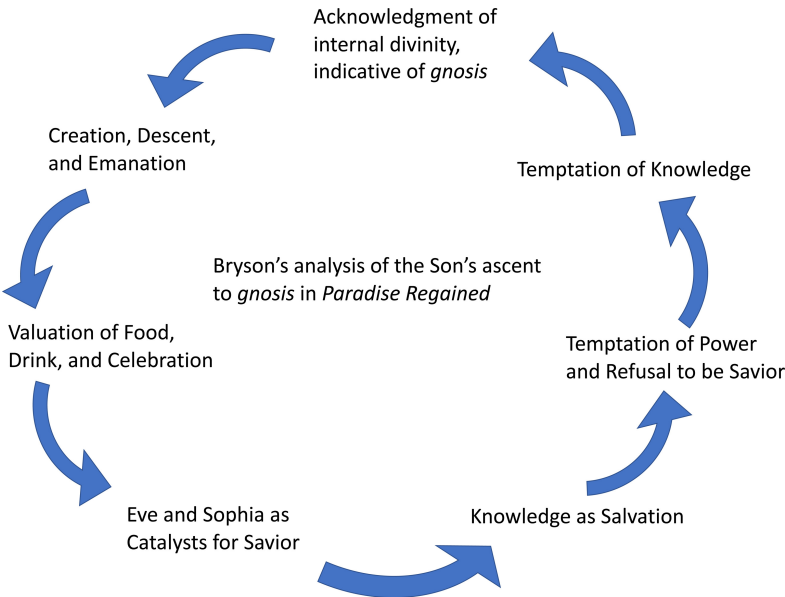


FIGURE 3 The Son's completed Gnostic cycle

The Son of *Paradise Lost* is ultimately a wonderfully Gnostic creation, though of the opposite trajectory from the Jesus of *Paradise Regained*: following the Gnostic worldview, in *Paradise Lost* creation occurs from the top down, and involves emanation from the inward perfection of highest beings to the lower beings of this world who are primarily concerned with earthly things. Only then can a Gnostic or the Son move from external, outward, and earthly things toward an inner focus on *gnosis* which enables ascent. To gnosticize the popular saying, what goes up must have already come down.

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